Where Do You Run by BCI603

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Genre: Alternate Universe - College/University, Alternate Universe - Modern Setting, Drama, Dustin is a Ethnomusicology Major, El is a Photography Major, F/M, Hurt/Comfort, Lucas is an Astronomy Major, M/M, Max Majors in Game Design, Mike is a Performance Major, Romance, Texting, Will is a Graphic Arts Major, attempted humor
Language: English
Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Holly Wheeler, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Karen Wheeler, Lucas Sinclair's Parents, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Original Characters, Steve Harrington, Will Byers
Relationships: Eleven | Jane Hopper/Mike Wheeler, Joyce Byers/ Jim "Chief" Hopper, Maxine "Max" Mayfield/Lucas Sinclair, Steve Harrington/Nancy Wheeler, Will Byers/Original Male Character(s)
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Summary:

The modern college AU where everyone ends up as housemates and Eleven falls for the curly haired musician, who, in return, has had a crush on her for the last two years and counting.

THIS IS BEING REPOSTED WITH LONGER CHAPTERS THANK YOU AND GOODNIGHT

1. Chapter One

Author's Note:

> idk what to say but hi ily I hope you enjoy the story again if you reread!

Wednesday, September 6, 2017

I cannot believe I'm actually doing this. El thought as she walked down the street. *I'm known for being socially awkward, shy and quiet, how in the hell am I supposed to do this without looking like an idiot?*

She was on her way to 011 Mineral Springs Street, which was coincidentally her high school nickname, to see if she could rent a room from them. She needed somewhere to stay and *fast* as her roommate got pregnant and moved her boyfriend and his *other two kids* in, and she was absolutely *not* having it. Oh, and the new semester/quarter starts in three weeks, so she's screwed if she can't find anywhere to stay soon.

On her way to hunt down the cheapest apartments she could, her soon to be step-brother Will texted her, and told her the house he'd been staying in the last couple months with his friends had a room available, and that he would talk to his friends for her. He ended up giving her the address, which is how she ended up there. She had never been there before, considering it's a side of town she's never gone to, and to say she was surprised was an understatement.

When she finally reached the house, she couldn't help but notice how beautiful it was. It was a two story house that had a *three* car garage. The front yard was huge, and she could only imagine how big the backyard was. She walked down the brick path leading up to the steps carefully, also known for being clumsy, especially when it came to hard surfaces.

Walking up the steps, she took a deep breath and knocked on the door. The door opened a few seconds later to reveal a redhead with long, wavy hair.

"Who the fuck are you?" She asked

"I, um, I'm Will's sister? I'm not sure if he's talked to you or not, but-." El said, but got interrupted,

"Yes!"

"He gave me the address." She finished lamely.

"Come on in and I'll interview you." The redhead told her, motioning for her to come in.

The living room was bigger than she expected. There was an L shaped couch, a recliner, and two comfy looking armchairs spread out around a coffee table, a flat screen TV hung on the wall above a *fireplace.*

"I'm Max." She said, holding out her hand after she shut the door. El shook it, smiling at her.

"El."

"Sorry if I seem a little bitchy, I just woke up a little while ago." Max said sheepishly. "You can sit down." She gestured to the couch. El sat down, sitting her bag on the floor next to her feet. "So, what do you do?"

"Um, I work as a waitress down at Benny's."

"Okay. Are you clean?" El nodded. "You can help us pay the bills, correct?"

"Of course. I can cook, clean-"

"You had me at cook." Max said. "You go to the University of Chicago?" El nodded. "What do you major in?"

"Photography, I'm a junior." She replied. She asked her a couple more questions, like why she was majoring in photography, how old she was, what her roommate had been like, and a bunch of other questions that El doesn't even remember.

"Well, you seem too sweet to be a serial killer." Max said finally, crossing her arms. El chuckled. "Do you have any questions? Or have anything we should probably know about? Like asthma or any serious allergies?" Max continued. El shook her head.

"No asthma or allergies. Um, so Will said that a room opened up, and, considering the house is a pretty decent size, er, how many people live here exactly?" She asked, fiddling with her hands.

"Well, before the room opened up, six." Max told her.

"Oh okay, are some of you guys you know, related? Or do you just know each other?

"No, no. We've all known each other since middle. I'm the only girl here. Mike's grandparents own the place." Max told her. "He's a junior too, well hell, all of us here are juniors actually, except for the bitch we kicked out. She was a freshman and crazy as *fuck*. " They talked for a few more minutes and Max finally said,

"So, I think you should move in. That is, if you're okay dealing with a bunch of twenty one year old dudes."

"Wait, shouldn't the guys get a say in this?" She snorted.

"I don't trust them enough for that, actually. They're the reason the other girl was even here. They have bad judgement on some things, so they let me have the reigns this time."

"Oh." El laughed. "When is a good time?" She asked.

"You can start moving in today if you want. Oh, and, uh, you'll be sharing with Mike if that's okay." She said. El raised an eyebrow. "It's the only free bed now. I share with Lucas, we're together, and Will and Dustin share a room. The house originally had four rooms but we turned one of them into a little library nook type of thing."

"Oh, that's fine, as long as he's not all disgusting and gross or anything." Max shook her head.

"Nah, he's the complete opposite. His room is always clean. Plus, it's the master so you'll be sharing a bathroom but it's pretty big so it's

worth it."

"Thank God, I'm *so* ready to get away from my room- *old* roommate." El grinned happily.

"Ooh, drama! Me likey!" Max said, laughing at the face El made.

"Do you need any help moving?" She asked. "Because I can come help if you'd like."

"I actually have most of my stuff in my car." El said cheekily. "I just have a few extra things to pack, but thank you though. Are you sure it's okay to come today?"

"Of course!" Max waved her off. "Will and Lucas will probably be here by the time you get back."

"Oh that's fine. I'll probably make a fool of myself then too, you might not want me living here after that." She joked, standing up and grabbing her bag. Max snorted.

"Don't even worry about it. The guys are straight up fools so it's nothing new." She told her. El grinned and nodded. "Hey, let me see your phone, I'll put my number in so you can text when you get here. We'll come help get your stuff." El handed her her phone and Max put her number in, then sent herself a text. She gave it back to El, who put it in her back pocket.

"I'll see you soon then, yeah?" Max nodded and waved to her as she left, shutting the door behind her quietly. She did a little happy dance when she saw that no one was around to see her. She all but ran down the steps and onto the sidewalk and went to where she parked her car down the road. She got in and blasted the music all the way back to her old apartment.

She didn't have that much stuff in the apartment, she never had. Mainly clothes and a couple pictures, a lamp in her bedroom and the bed sheets and pillows. That was it. When she got there, she was relieved to be *alone* for the first time since she came back from Hawkins. She immediately yanked the covers and sheets off her bed, folding them as neatly as possible and stuffing them in a trash bag.

She did the same with the few shirts and pants and undergarments she had kept out, and grabbed her two pillows. She took them out to the car and then went back to put the lamp and pictures in a box. After double checking everything, she grabbed a piece of paper and pen, and wrote a note to Tiffany.

Well, I'm out! The kids can take my old room. If you need me, you know my number. Good luck with the new baby and the kids. I'm locking back up and sliding the key back under the door. :)

Love, El

Tiffany, by all means, was *not* her best friend, and never was, but they'd known each other since Freshman year and were good friends, but that doesn't mean El had to stay with her and take care of some other chicks kids while she and her boyfriend went out having fun. She put the note on the counter where it would easily be seen, and left, grabbing the box on her way out.

After stuffing the box in the back seat, she sent Max a text.

(4:31 PM) El- Hey! I'm otw back, I'll be there in about twenty minutes!

(4:31) Max- Okay, sweet! Will and Lucas are here, so we'll make them bring everything in XD

(4:31) El- Lmao awesome XD

(4:33)Max- I'll open one of the garage doors and you can park in there :)

(4:33) El- Is that okay? I don't want to take someone else's spot.

(4:34) Max- Oh yeah, it's fine! out of the five of us, we only got 2 cars lmao.

(4:35) El- Oh okay, well awesome! I'll see you soon!

(4:35) Max- Be careful!

El smiled and sent back a heart emoji and tossed her phone in the

passenger seat, and was back on her way to her *house* . She couldn't believe she didn't make a fool of herself, although she probably did go a bit too in detail about certain things, which she just giggled about, thinking about them. They'll probably think she's crazy once they get to know her. Then the most random thought struck her, well, maybe not the *most* random.

I wonder if Mike's hot?

After she texted El, Max made herself something to eat and decided to text the group chat, informing them they had a new housemate.

The Par-tayy

(4:53 PM) Zoomer- Yo nerds, we gots a new housemate

(4:53) Zoomer- Mikey boy ur gonna looove me!

(4:53) Magic Mike- Oh jeez, why?

(4:54) Willy Will- Omg did you like El? Is she moving in?

(4:54) Dusty- Whom tf is El?

(4:56) Willy Will- My soon-to-be step sister. She needed a place to stay so I told her the address.

(4:56) Zoomer- correct! I made sure she wasn't like, a secret serial killer or anything and I like her. She's a lil awkward but it's cute. She's also pretty damn hot if I say so myself, Mikey ;)

(4:57) Stalker- Oh shit do i have anything to worry about w her, Max???

(4:57) Zoomer- lmao no stalker

(5:00) Magic Mike- why do i love you? i'm confused

(5:02) Zoomer- because ur gonna have a hot girl as a roommate, duh

(5:05) Magic Mike- Oh

(5:05) Magic Mike- frick you Max don't try and set me up with her

(5:07) Dusty- Yeah the last time that happened didn't end well

(5:07) Zoomer- oh stfu no one said anything about setting anyone up. wait til you see her tho, you'll be head over heels for her. bet

(5:12) Willy Will- ok id rather u NOT call my sister hot, but she is beautiful.

(5:13) Magic Mike- yeah yeah, i gtg, Holly is attempting to BRAID my hair and I need to go pack

(5:13) Zoomer- lmao i love holly

Just like she said, Max had opened one of the garage doors, so she parked carefully, and almost jumped out of her skin when she saw Will sitting on the hood of his car, with a cute, dark skinned boy sitting next to him.

"Will!" El exclaimed, jumping out and hugging him tightly.

"El! Why didn't you text me?" He asked, hugging her back.

"I thought I did? Oops." He snorted and let her go. He gestured to the guy and said,

"El, this is Lucas. This is El, my sister." Lucas gave her a grin and held out a hand.

"It's nice to meet you, El." He said, shaking her hand.

"Likewise."

"So! Let's start moving you in, huh? You're on the second floor so be careful." Will told her, wiggling his eyebrows. She snorted.

"It could be one step, Will, and I'd break a bone."

"I know." He chuckled. She grabbed the box with the lamp and pictures. Will grabbed her bag of bed sheets and Lucas picked up two boxes out of the trunk. Will held the door open for her and she grinned at him, and then smiled at Max, who was in the kitchen.

"Boys, go get the rest of her stuff while I show her around." Max said, clapping her hands and pointing towards the garage door. They went without question, and El giggled. Max had changed out of the T-shirt and sweatpants she had on earlier and into a pair of jean shorts and a red tank top, her hair pulled back in a ponytail. She grabbed her wrist and pulled her down the hall.

"So, obviously that was the kitchen, I'll go into detail with that later." She told her, and El smiled. "That's the living room, which you've seen already. This is the dining room, this is one of the half bathrooms. It's the only bathroom on this floor. This is our little library nook, thanks to Steve and his handy-ness with a hammer and screwdriver." El giggled quietly as Max showed her each room.

She showed her each room, which were all about the same size and had the same lay out. Her and Lucas' shared room had a half bathroom, and there was a full bathroom in the hall. Will and Dustin's didn't, but that just made their closet bigger.

They went back downstairs as the boys continued bringing her stuff up. She had managed to put eight boxes of clothes in the trunk of her car, they weren't *that* big, and everything else, like shoes and makeup, were in the backseat.

"I'll show you your room last, so you can start settling in." Max explained, noticing the confused look on El's face. She nodded. "So, this is technically the last part of the tour, other than the backyard, which I'll show you later, once you're settled in. When everyone's all home, we're all gonna go chill and jam." Max told her. El raised an eyebrow, and nodded, following her down to a *basement.*

Jesus Christ, this is the best room in the house!

"Wow." That was all she could say as the stared at all the instruments. There were four guitars hanging up on the wall, a piano, a drum set, and a damn *ukulele* with the guitars. There were two giant bean bags thrown in the corner, a couch against the wall, and a table with six chairs sitting in the middle. "This is fucking insane-Oops, sorry." Max snorted.

"Don't worry girl, we're all potty mouths. It is pretty cool though, isn't

it?" El nodded. "Mike's grandparents are *loaded* and so are his parents, but they're kinda shitty so... Yeah. Mike is kinda spoiled, right along with his older and younger sister." El nodded in understanding. "You're welcome down here anytime you want, there's usually at least one person down here during the day. We all love music, whether it's just music itself, singing or playing an instrument."

"I think this'll be my favorite place." El said, smiling at her.

"Mine too." Max smiled back. "Let's go back up, I can help you unpack if you want?"

"Oh you don't have to. I don't want to be a bother."

"You're fine! I would be spending time with Lucas but he's going grocery shopping, and I hate that, so I'm not going anywhere near Wal-mart." El snorted.

"Just about every piece of clothing I own is from Wal-mart." Max sighed, nodding.

"Same. I'd rather go to the mall though. Have you been to the mall around here? If not, then you're *not living.* " El giggled. The conversation flowed between them as they went back to the main floor, and then to the second, where Will was waiting on El's new bed. She started laughing at the pose he'd been making.

"You dumbass, what the hell." She said, tossing a pillow at him. He laughed and shrugged, sitting up.

"Want me to help unpack?" He asked.

"You can as long as you don't break anything." She gave him a pointed look. He raised his hands in surrender.

"I won't!" She winked at him and he snorted. The three got to work, unboxing all her clothes. She let them focus on her shirts and pants while she refolded her undergarments and put them in the dresser that had been in her room. The room was a decent size, probably three sizes bigger than the one she'd had at the apartment.

Max had been right, Mike was clean. His bed was made neatly, and

his desk, which was next to the bedroom door, had a cup with pencils and pens, a stack of paper and a few books stacked on top of each other in the middle. She looked at his side of the room carefully, as she folded a random shirt. She was pretty sure he had a king sized bed considering how big it was, and there was a bedside table next to it that had the exact same lamp she did. She giggled a little at that. There was a dresser on the other right side of the desk. There was a smaller flat screen sitting on top of it, and finally, a closet.

There was a window between them, another table across from his and then her bed. Her bed was closer to the bathroom, and a dresser the same size as his to the left of it. There were a couple comic books laid out on top of his dresser, next to a pretty hefty stack of movies. There were movie posters almost covering the entire wall on his side.

"There's a closet in the bathroom." Max told her. "I don't know why, exactly, but there is, and it's empty so it's yours now." El snorted and nodded.

"You had a box solely dedicated to hangers, El, really?" Will asked, tossing one at her. It hit her butt and she scowled at him, throwing it back at him as Max hung up one of her dresses. Will snorted.

"Yes, I did, William." She stuck her tongue out at him. After she finished filling two of the drawers, she put the sheets on her bed, and then grabbed the box that had her makeup and bathroom essentials in it, and took it in the bathroom. She sat it on the floor and went back to help put the rest of her clothes up.

When they finished, the three sat on her bed, taking a break and talking.

"Thanks for helping me, guys." El told them, smiling.

"I don't think I had a choice." Will mumbled and she hit him with a pillow.

"You offered to help, idiot!" He laughed

"It's not a problem, El, really. I didn't mind at all." El smiled at her again.

"When's Mike and Dustin coming back?" Will asked, laying on his stomach.

"Either late tomorrow night or sometime Friday morning. Mike said he was packing earlier so I'd assume it'd be soon." Max replied.

"Hey, how have I not met them? Aren't you guys like best friends?" El asked.

"You're antisocial as hell, El. That's why." Will said, nudging her foot.

"Oh, true." El shrugged. Max snorted.

"So, Will the Wise, when's your mom and Hop getting hitched?" Max asked

"This spring." El replied when Will looked at her. "Sometime in April, they haven't set an exact date yet."

"Oh yeah, I forgot you were gonna be step-siblings for a second." Max said, tucking a loose strand of hair behind her ear.

"Sadly." El sighed, mocking annoyance. Will glared at her and she laughed. "I'm kidding, dude, I love you." He just rolled his eyes and she snorted.

"Love you too." He replied. "Sometimes." She chuckled.

"You were adopted, right?" Max asked her. El nodded.

"Yep, Hop adopted me when I was twelve."

"Wait, I thought you were eleven?" Will said, confused.

"That was just my nickname, idiot." She said, thumping his leg.

"You're nickname is Eleven? Is that where El comes from?" Max asked. She nodded.

"My actual name is Jane Hopper."

"Where'd the nickname come from?" Max asked.

"Because I was born on the eleventh day of the eleventh month."

"Oh! Cool!" They talked for a little while longer, and El decided to ask,

"So, this Mike guy." She started, "Is he hot?" The two laughed and El raised an eyebrow.

"Oh, you were serious? Well, I mean, I'm taken so..." Max shrugged. "He is good looking, I'll say that."

"He's tall as shit, like six three or something. Fucking giraffe looking ass." El snorted.

"Here." Max said, handing her her phone. There was a picture of two guys, arms wrapped around each other's shoulders. "That's Mike, and this is Dustin." He was a head taller than the other guy. Both of them had curly hair, and once El got a good look at them, she realized she knew who they were.

Mike is pretty hot though.

"Hey! They're the guys that sing at those concerts." She said, looking at them. They nodded.

"I didn't know you went to those concerts?" Will asked.

"I mean, I didn't go willingly, Tiffany dragged me to a couple of them. They were pretty good, that explains the basement." They laughed.

"Yeah, they're both majoring in music. All of us are into music just not as much as them."

"I think it's cool. If I didn't like photography so much, I'd probably major in music too."

"It's true, she sings hella good. I blame Jonathan for getting her into photography though." El rolled her eyes.

"I'm not *that* good."

"Bullshit." He nudged her and she rolled her eyes.

"Anyways." She nudged him back. "Could one of you ask Mike if it's okay to use one of the drawers in the bathroom?"

"Why don't I add you to the group chat? Then you could ask him." Max suggested. "I'm not saying that to be a bitch, I just wanna add you anyways." El snorted and nodded. "Also, I'm changing your name to Eleven."

"Okay."

The Par-tayy

(Zoomer added Eleven to the chat)

(6:23 PM) Zoomer- Mike, Dustin, meet El. El, meet those two nerds.

(6:23) Dusty- Hi El! Mike can't come to the phone right now, his little sister just kneed him in the balls.

(6:24) Eleven- Hi! Oh, wow, okay lmao

(6:25) Stalker- what he do to deserve that?

(6:25) Dusty- there are multiple things he could have done, all I know is I was coming in from the kitchen because I heard him yell

(6:26) Dusty- and I saw him in the fetal position on the floor while Holly laughed.

(6:26) Dusty- Rip Mike Wheelers balls, he will have no children at this rate

(6:27) Eleven- LMAO XD

(6:27) Willy Will- well then, rip

(6:29) Zoomer- you guys are disgusting lmao don't scare El away she hasn't even been here two hours yet.

(6:29) Stalker- fr

(6:37) Magic Mike- Hello, I am here, and I have miraculously survived getting kneed in the balls by my 12 year old sister.

(6:37) Magic Mike- Hi El, I'm sorry about that idiot.

(6:39) Eleven- lol it's all good

(6:39) Eleven- what did you do for her to knee you in the balls

(6:41) Magic Mike- idek tbh

(6:41) Magic Mike- like i was helping her with hw cus you know, Hawkins middle school loves to torture children and give them homework like 2 weeks after school starts

(6:41) Magic Mike- and she crawled over me and kneed me and I saw nothing but black for all of three seconds.

(6:44) Stalker- ouch. sucks to be you man

(6:45) Zoomer- i love holly but she's a demon sometimes i stg

(6:48) Magic Mike- she takes after Nancy

(6:48) Magic Mike- so not looking forward to her being in hs

(6:49) Zoomer- OH

(6:49) Zoomer- El didn't you have a question for Mike

(6:49) Eleven- Lmao yeah

(6:53) Magic Mike- shoot

(6:54) Eleven- is it okay if I use one of the drawers in the bathroom?

(6:57)Magic Mike- oh yeah ofc i only use like one drawer and like 1/4 of the cabinet so have at it

(6:57) Magic Mike- use all of em if you want lmao

(6:58) Eleven- okay awesome ty :)

(6:58) Magic Mike- no problem :)

(7:02) Willy Will- So Mike, it escalated pretty quickly, huh?

(7:02) Magic Mike- what did

(7:03) Zoomer- i stg mike you idiot

(7:04) Willy Will- how Holly was braiding your hair earlier and then kneed you in the balls

(7:06) Magic Mike- Oh

(7:06) Magic Mike- stfu max lmao

(7:08) Magic Mike- Also, can we NOT talk about my balls anymore. Jesus y'all gon make El wanna leave before me and Dustin even get there

(7:11) Eleven- Lmao nah, this is a shit ton more entertaining than my old roommate(s)

(7:12) Zoomer- Oooh El tell them the drama of ur roommate

(7:16) Dusty- I'm always ready for drama. Hit me w it!

(7:16) Eleven- lmao okay so

(7:17) Eleven- I've lived in the same apartment since freshman year with this girl named tiffany right? Well she's had a couple dif bfs and such and the latest one has two kids

(7:19) Eleven- I've dealt with him and the kids for the last like 5 months, well technically 4 cus i went home for break. I mean they weren't that bad but we only had two (2) rooms, 1 bathroom and a tiny ass kitchen. 5 people being there sucked.

(7:21) Magic Mike- Jesus

(7:21) Eleven- that's not all

(7:22) Eleven- like they didn't live with us until like three weeks ago, they'd stayed the night before but not straight up living there. oh,

and get this, she's preggers so i'm like

(7:24) Eleven- no no honey

(7:24) Eleven- after staying there a couple days i packed all my shit and went on the hunt for cheap ass apartments and then will texted me saying y'all had a room available and i'm like sweet so i came and talked to max and now i'm living here :D

(7:26)Eleven- i usually love kids but good god they were both under the age of five and this guy is only 20

(7:29) Dusty- oh my god lord have mercy i'm glad you got away from those things you call children

(7:29) Dusty- i am so sorry you had to deal with that.

(7:30) Eleven- lmao uh, thanks? ig

(7:34) Magic Mike- ignore him he's got a stick up his ass cus kids don't like him

(7:34) Magic Mike- but that does suck at least you don't have to deal with it anymore

(7:35) Stalker- fr that's the worst thing imaginable.

(7:36)Stalker- i mean it'd be different if it was your own kids you know?

(7:36) Eleven- Lmao XD. and yeah it sucks. his baby mama even came by one day being a bitch

(7:37) Eleven- I almost beat her ass like she almost broke my laptop

(7:37) Zoomer- okay now that's some bullshit

(7:38) Zoomer- like who tf

(7:41) Eleven- ikr! fucking bitch

(7:43) Willy Will- lmao

(7:48) Dusty- gtg Holly has decided she wants to put makeup on mike and he's running from her and i gotta save his ass. ttyl guyssss

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"So, El, what days do you work?" Lucas asked as he handed her a paper plate. They had ordered pizza for the four of them, since no one felt like cooking.

"I work six to three Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and eleven to seven on Saturdays."

"Hey, that rhymes." Will said with a mouthful of pizza. El snorted.

"Do you like working there?" Max asked. El shrugged, taking two slices of pizza out of the box.

"It's alright, it sucks waking up so early but I deal with it. The worst part is having to deal with Troy's dumbass. It pays pretty good, considering I'm only a waitress. I get a shit ton of tips." They all chuckled. "I love Benny though, he's a big ass teddy bear."

"He really is." Lucas agreed with her.

"He lets us put our trash in the dumpster behind the restaurant." Max said, mouth full of pizza.

"So that's where all the trash comes from, then?" El joked and she snorted, nodding.

"Hey, has Mike said anything about what we're doing for Dustin's birthday Friday?" Lucas asked Max, who nodded.

"I texted him earlier, you know, when Holly wasn't hunting him down trying to put eyeliner all over his face." El snorted. "He said Dustin wants to get wasted for the first time legally at a bar, which is understandable."

"Only you, him, and Will can get in though."

"I know, but Mike doesn't like partying and shit like us either. And don't you have a fake ID?" Max asked Lucas accusingly.

"Yeah but it's so stupid." He whined.

"Do you just not wanna drink?" Max cooed. "Because you can go home and come pick us up." He scowled at her, then made a face.

"Yeah, I really don't want to. Not after what happened last time. You're not twenty one either, right El?"

"Right, and I hate bars. I've gotten in them a couple times and every time people grab my ass. *Every time.* "

"Well, it's up to Dustin, but maybe we could all go out to dinner, the six of us, and then we can drop you three off?" Lucas asked.

"Me too?" El asked, surprised.

"Well yeah. I mean, you're our friend now. You don't have to if you don't want to, since you work early on Fridays." Max said, looking at her.

"No, no, I just didn't expect it." She chuckled. "I'd love to go."

"Awesome! When we're done eating I'll text Mike and let him know."

"Why not Dustin?" El asked.

"Because he usually doesn't respond to texts unless they're in the group chat. No one knows why." Will told her. She snorted.

When they finished the two boxes of pizza, they watched a random movie on Lifetime until about 9 o'clock, when El decided she was gonna go facetime with her dad.

"I'm gonna go facetime dad and get ready for bed. Thank you guys again for letting me move in." El told them, smiling at them as she stood up from the couch.

"Hop can facetime?" Will asked, surprised. El snorted and nodded.

"We like having you here already girl, it's awesome." Max said and Lucas nodded in agreement. El blushed a light pink and smiled at them.

"Goodnight guys." She called as she walked up the stairs. She heard them say goodnight as she walked into her room. She flopped on her bed, pulling her phone out of her pocket and calling her dad. His grinning face appeared on the screen.

"Hey! I did it right this time!" She laughed, turning her lamp on.

"Yeah you did! Guess what?"

"What?"

"I live with Will now." Hopper raised an eyebrow.

"Do you now? Since when did that happen?"

"Since about four o'clock this afternoon." She replied. "I was out looking for apartments and he texted me and told me that they had a room, or well, more like a bed, available. I came and talked to one of his friends after he gave me the address. Her name's Max and she *interviewed* me and an hour later I was practically moved in."

"Well that's awesome! But isn't the house full of boys?"

"Eh, yeah." She said sheepishly. "I'm kinda sharing a room with one of them? But don't worry, they told me he's a good guy and I don't have to worry about him doing anything."

"Huh, you'll tell me if he does something though, right?"

"Of course, dad. I haven't met him officially yet, he's in Hawkins with Dustin."

"Dustin Henderson?"

"I think that's his last name, yeah."

"Is he your roommate?"

"No, his name's Mike Wheeler."

"Huh, well, I know for a fact he won't bother you. Just tell him I'm your dad and he'll be terrified." El snorted.

"You know them?"

"Oh yeah, I know Lucas and Max too. Through Will, of course, and Steve, actually, but I think Mike is scared of me. I give him good reason too, though."

"What'd you do?"

"I yelled at him when he was thirteen." He replied. "I thought he was one of the kids out vandalizing shit but it wasn't him. Almost peed his pants."

"Dad!" She laughed. "You're just a big meanie."

"Hey, I'm chief of police. I gotta put the fear in those boys while they're young." She snorted.

"Sure you do, you big ass teddy bear. Well, I just wanted to call and let you know I'm safe and finally free of screaming children. I'm gonna head to bed, I've had a busy day today." He chuckled.

"Alright, I'll talk to you tomorrow. I love you."

"I love you too, dad." She gave him one last smile and hung up, tossing her phone on the bed. She washed her makeup off, and then took a shower. She towel dried her curly hair as much as she could and brushed her teeth. She pulled back the covers and literally fell face first into the bed. She grabbed her phone to plug it into the charger and noticed she had a text.

Who the fu-Oh, it's Mike.

She chuckled at the text and saved his number.

(9:58 PM) Mike- Hey, I snagged ur number out the gc. Just wanted to let you know there's a fan in my closet cus our room is known for getting hot af at night.

(10:12) El- Haha okay awesome, ty! It's all good right now but ty for letting me know.

(10:13) Mike- It's np, we are roommates after all :)

(10:13) El- XD

(10:13) El- so did Dustin succeed in protecting you from ur sister?

(10:15) Mike- Ehh for the most part, yeah. She didn't get to put makeup on me thank god

(10:15) Mike- idk what's up with her i think nancy, my older sister if u didn't know, has been showing her makeup vids or something on youtube

(10:16) El- lmao it's cute tho. i've met her before, actually. Will and Jonathan are my (soon-to-be) step-brothers and Jon's her bff. Plus ik her bf lmao

(10:17) Mike- your dad is the chief?!?!?!

(10:20) El- Yep! I talked to him earlier about u earlier actually

(10:20) Mike- oh shit

(10:22) Mike- he's not gonna like, murder me for being ur roommate is he?

(10:22) El- lmao no. He knows you wouldn't do anything you shouldn't do

(10:23) Mike- good cus i honestly wouldn't

(10:23) El- I know :) he also told me he almost made you pee ur pants when you were 13

(10:25) Mike- shit

(10:26) Mike- i didn't pee myself, for one, and two, have you SEEN ur dad. we're like the same height but he's three times bigger than me. I'm like a giant noodle or something.

(10:26) El- Lmao ik he's huge. when he adopted me i was like holy fuck

(10:27) El- also i hope you know i'm gonna call you Noodle now.

(10:28) Mike- tbh i walked into that

(10:28) Mike- oh ur adopted?

(10:31) El- yeah, when i was 12

(El changed Mike to Noodle)

(10:33) Noodle- LMAO XD

(10:33) Noodle- i didn't know that. well someone prob told me but as you saw in the gc i don't pay much attention sometimes

(10:34) El- lmao same tho

(10:34) El- wait how tall are you?

(10:36) Noodle- 6'3

(10:39) El- well shit ur legit a foot taller than me. i'm 5'3 D:

(10:41) Noodle- lmao ur short then!

(10:41) El- -_- -_-

(10:41) El- ur right tho

(10:42) El- when y'all coming back?

(10:45) Noodle- Dustin wants to come back tomorrow but we got shit to do in the morning and afternoon but we're gonna drive back that night. prob around like 12 or 1 am depending

(10:46) El- oh okay, i'll be asleep then lmao. I'll have an alarm set for 5, do you think it would bother u?

(10:47) Noodle- nah i'm a heavy sleeper. WW3 could happen right outside the door and i wouldn't wake up

(10:47) Noodle- wait why tf you getting up so early?

(10:49)El- I have work at 6 lmao. so i get up at 5 to get ready

(10:51) Noodle- oh okay. what days do you work?

(10:51) El- Mon, Wed, & Fri 6-3 and on Sat 11-7

(10:51) El- i work at Benny's

(10:53) Noodle- oh okay damn that's early. u know i think i've seen u before even tho idk what u look like

(10:53) Noodle- i used to get coffee before class

(10:54) El- you prob have. i can send a pic if you want

(10:55) Noodle- i mean u don't have to lmao. it's up to u

(10:56) El- lmao ok hang on

(10:56) El- (selfie of El in her uniform, hair pulled up in a bun)

(10:57) Noodle- yep definitely seen you

(10:57) Noodle- you cussed troy out one day.

(10:59) El- LMAO I hate him so fucking much

(11:01) Noodle- Same

(11:02) Noodle- ur really pretty btw

(11:04) El- awe thank you! <3 ur sweeter than i thought you were lmao

(11:07) Noodle- :D

(11:08) El- this bed is so freaking comfy i stg

(11:08) El- so much better than my old one

(11:13) Noodle- good lmao

(11:17)El- okay well i'ma go to sleep since i been up since 5 lmao. Goodnight, Mike :)

(11:18) Noodle- Goodnight! I hope you sleep good.

(11:18) El- Ty, you too :)

With a blush and a smile on her face, she drifted off to sleep, thinking about Mike.

Why the fuck am I thinking about him, I haven't even met him yet?

Hawkins, Indiana

"Dustin, I am royally fucked." Mike said, falling face down into his bed next to Dustin. Dustin lifted his head up a bit to look at him.

"Why?" He asked. "And who the hell have you been over there texting and cheesing at?"

"Do you remember the girl that I had, well, *have* a crush on that works at Benny's? Remember when I told you about her?"

"Yeah, you'd never tell me which girl she was."

"Well, I know who she is for sure now."

"Who?" He asked, confused.

"El." He wouldn't look at Dustin, but he could feel his eyes burning a hole in the side of his head.

"Dude, seriously?" He asked, surprised. Mike hummed in response. "How do you know?"

"I texted her to tell her about the fan in my closet and we kept texting. She just went to bed." He added. "She told me about working at Benny's and I told her I probably knew her, and she sent me a picture and Jesus Christ man how is there a woman on this earth as pretty as her." He groaned into his pillow. Dustin giggled, yes, *giggled,* at him. "It's not funny, Dustin!"

"It kinda is, man. You're acting like you're back in middle school crushing on girls you know you won't have a chance with."

"Because I don't? Jeez, dude, her dad is the *Chief* , and I'm way outta her league. She wouldn't go for some nerdy guy like me. I've had a crush on her for the last two fucking years and I've never talked to her, not until tonight."

"Okay, first off, the Chief is cool, and second, yeah you're nerdy but I mean, so's me, Lucas, and Will, and Lucas has a cool ass girlfriend."

"She's a nerd too."

"Not the point. You're a nerdy music guy, and girls *love* nerdy music guys."

"How come you haven't got a girlfriend then?"

"Let me say this *again* , not the point, Michael." Mike glared at him. "And you're a nice guy, and that's pretty rare nowadays, so I think you have a pretty nice shot. At least actually get to know her before you try anything."

"I'm *never* trying anything, you idiot."

"So you're just gonna die alone?"

"Wha-? Dustin, shut the hell up, no I'm not gonna die alone. " *I hope.* "It's *just* a crush, it'll pass eventually."

"I'm sure it will."

"Ugh, whatever. Go get on the couch." He pushed him off the bed and Dustin laughed. He got up off the floor, snatching his pillow off the bed and walking towards the door.

"Goodnight, lover boy." He narrowly missed Mike's shoe, laughing as he walked down the hall.

2. Chapter Two

Thursday, September 7, 2017

El woke up at around ten o'clock the next morning. She rolled onto her back and stretched, letting out a low groan. It's the best night she's slept in weeks. Having two toddlers wake up screaming in the middle of night definitely didn't help her sleeping schedule. She turned on her side and unplugged her phone, checking for messages. There were just a few Instagram notifications and Will on Snapchat, and some texts from him, text-screaming at her to wake up so they'd keep their one hundred and ninety-two day streak going. She rolled her eyes and took a selfie, flipping him off, and sending it to him. She got up, leaving her phone on the table, and went and relieved herself. She washed her hands and then brushed her teeth, pulling her hair back up into a bun. She put a T-shirt on over her tank top, grabbed her phone, and went downstairs, where Lucas and Will were in the kitchen.

"Good morning." She told Lucas.

"Morning." He smiled at her.

"What about me?" Will asked. She scowled at him and said something in Spanish.

"What did you say?" Lucas asked, confused.

"Good morning mother fucker." She replied casually. Lucas laughed. "Where's Max?"

"Showering." He replied. "We're gonna go out for a late breakfast if you want to join."

"Sure! I'm gonna go get ready then." She said. She bumped her hip with Will's and then went back upstairs. She dug through her closet and found a loose, pink-ish, purple short sleeved shirt and jean shorts that stopped right above her knees. She dug through the box of shoes until she found her black sandals and tossed them towards the door. Leaving her hair up, she did her makeup pretty quickly, concealer, a

bit of blush, a nude eyeshadow and mascara. She made her bed up and grabbed her purse and phone, put her shoes on, and hopped back down the steps. She went back in the kitchen and sat at the island beside Will.

"Huh, that was quick." He nudged her. She shrugged.

"I've gotten a lot better at getting ready faster."

"Obviously, she used to take like, an hour and a half to get ready for school. We were late almost always."

"So that explains it, huh?" Max asked, walking into the kitchen. Her hair was up in a bun too, albeit messier than El's, and she had a makeup free face, wearing black leggings and a blue T-shirt with flip-flops. El glared at Will and he laughed. "Hey, don't worry, we always make Lucas take a shower last because he takes two to three hour long ones." El raised an eyebrow.

"Really?" She asked. He shrugged.

"I like showers, don't judge me." She chuckled.

"Don't you look pretty, eh?" Max told her, looking her up and down. El shrugged, smiling when she remembered her conversation with Mike last night.

"So, Mike told me I was pretty last night." Will choked on his water and Lucas smacked him on the back a couple times, laughing.

"When did you talk to Mike?" He asked.

"He texted me while I was in the shower to let me know about the fan in his closet." She shrugged. "And we got to texting, ended up texting for an hour."

"But why did he call you pretty? I'm pretty sure he's never seen you."

"I told him about how I work at Benny's and he said he's pretty sure he'd seen me there, but didn't know what I looked like, so I sent him a picture. He remembered the day I cussed Troy out. Then said I was pretty." She shrugged again, like it was no big deal.

"Girl." Max deadpanned.

"What?"

"Do you have any idea how rare it is for Mike to compliment a girl other than his sisters or mom, and even that's rare?"

"Uh, no? I literally only talked to him for like an hour."

"It is rare." Lucas agreed. "He never really shows any interest in anyone, like at all."

"He only goes on dates because I set him up with someone." Max added.

"And they never work out, but usually it's because she has bad taste in women." Will pointed a thumb out at her. She snorted.

"You know, now that I think about it, I *have* seen him before, at Benny's, but I've never talked to him. I always thought he was cute. I've never been *up close* so I was surprised when he told me how tall he was." Max snorted at that.

"I'll say it again, fucking giraffe." Will said.

"No, he's a giant noodle." El corrected. "He called himself that, so I will be calling him Noodle from now on."

"Dude!" Lucas burst out laughing. She grinned. "Jeez, I like you. Not like that!" He corrected quickly, before Max or Will could say anything. The two laughed. "You're funny as hell." He said, chuckling.

"Eh, I try." She shrugged. "That's a total lie, I'm awkward as hell if you haven't noticed already. Plus I say what's on my mind without thinking sometimes, so y'all will probably hear me say some weird shit."

"It's true." Will said. "She called herself a potato out loud one time, then later that night, at like, three in the morning, *I am the frenchiest french fry.*" Will mocked her, and Lucas and Max burst out laughing.

"What the hell, El!" Max laughed.

"Hey, that rhymed!" The four continued laughing for a few minutes, saying random things and causing it to start up again, before finally leaving to go to breakfast, which, by now as basically lunch. They decided on the Waffle House, which El was very happy about. They drove Will's car, and she sat in the passenger seat. They were just listening to music when Lucas' phone rang.

"Oh God, it's Dustin." Will snorted and turned the radio all the way down as Lucas answered.

"What's up, man?" He put it on speaker.

"Uh, nothing much really dude. I've been staying at Mike's 'cause my mom and all her damn cats, you know?" Lucas snorted.

"Oh yeah, I know. How many is it now?" Max asked.

"Mike, how many cats does my mom have?" Dustin asked.

"I don't fucking know, it's your mom!" Mike, who had a shockingly deep voice, said. El raised an eyebrow at that, but giggled at his response.

"Hey, do you have it on speaker too?"

"Hell yeah, I do. We're on the way to Waffle House for lunch."

"Oh, who all is it?"

"The four of us." Will called.

"Hey Will!" Mike yelled.

"Four? Wha-Oh, right. Hey El!" Dustin yelled this time. El laughed.

"Hey, you two!" She called back.

"Oh wow, you have a nice voice." Dustin chirped.

"What in the fuck?" Mike mumbled. "You weird ass."

"Says you, Mr. I'm gonna cut some cartwheels with my lanky ass body and probably cut my chin open again." Dustin sassed.

"That was a particularly long last name." Mike retorted. "And I've gotten better at them. I was like, ten when that happened."

"Oh yeah, I remember that. That was funny as hell." Will said.

"Who asked you, Mr. bowl cut?"

"Ooh, sassy today, are we, Noodle?" Max teased, and winked at El. It was silent for a couple seconds, and Dustin burst out laughing.

"You guys should see how red faced he is right now. Shit, lemme see your phone." There were a couple weird sounds and curses from the other end, Dustin laughing as he took a picture.

"You know he could delete it, right?" Lucas asked.

"Well, duh. I sent it to my phone so I'll send it in the group chat later." The four in the car laughed.

"Yes, I'm a giant noodle and I'm not afraid to admit it."

"Yep! How ya doin', Noodle?" El joked. Mike snorted.

"Good until you exposed me." She shrieked with laughter at that and everyone else couldn't help but laugh with her, at the comment, and *her laugh.*

"Ahh, I'm sorry, Noodle, I won't expose you anymore." He laughed again. *Wow, I really like his laugh. Wait, what?*

"Okay well, we'll see you guys what, in the morning?" Lucas asked, unbuckling his seat belt.

"Yeah, unless you're up until like twelve or one." Mike replied.

"Oh, well I'll be up so I'll see you two then." Max called, getting out of the car after El.

"We're going in, we'll talk to you guys later, alright?" Lucas said.

"Byeee!" They yelled into the phone. Lucas laughed and hung up, shaking his head.

He and Max held hands as they walked in, sitting at the table Will and El chose.

"So, anyone know what they're gonna get?"

"Waffles." El replied immediately. Will snorted.

"She *loves* waffles. Especially eggos."

"Eggos are my one and only love." She said seriously. The other two laughed. Their phones all dinged at the same time and grinned, knowing it was Dustin.

The Par-tayy

(11:47 AM) Dusty- Who knew Mike's face could get this red?

(11:47) Dusty- (pic of Mike making grabby hands at his phone, squinting from the sunlight, face red as fire)

(11:48) Zoomer- Awe! Guys, look at him! All red faced and embarrassed.

(11:48) Magic Mike- kjdcklsadjbclkacblkdcb

(11:49) Willy Will- That was an ugly keyboard smash, Noodle.

(11:49) Magic Mike- Will i hate u

A waitress walked up to them, the four giggling, and managed to order their food before going back to the group chat.

(11:56) Stalker- lmfao mike why was ur face so red anyways?

(11:56) Magic Mike- idk man

(11:57) Dusty- I knowwww ;)

(11:57) Dusty- hey did you guys know mike is abusive

(11:59) Eleven- what did you do to make him abusive?

(12:01 PM) Zoomer- LMAO EL

(12:01) Dusty- I'll have you know I did nothing wrong.

(12:02) Magic Mike- ok

(12:02) Dusty- 1, he just punched me in the arm, which, considering he has Noodle arms, actually hurt

(12:03) Dusty- 2, he pushed me off his bead last night

(12:03) Dusty- bed* wtf bead

(12:04) Stalker- dude we all know the only time mike ever hits anyone is because they've pissed him off, meaning you pissed him off or something. Even El knows this and she's never been around you two.

(12:06) Dusty- you know what u right u right

(12:06) Dusty- Mike's still abusive tho like who pushes someone off a bed?

(12:09) Eleven- whatever the reason, u prob deserved it XD

(12:09) Dusty- man y'all got el against me already DX

(12:11) Eleven- lmao nah i like you guys, you guys are cool.

(12:13) Magic Mike- to the guy who ISN'T driving back to Chicago at 11 o'clock at night better stfu or i'm leaving your ass

(12:13) Magic Mike- ily man but jesus

(12:15) Zoomer- LMAO you guys r funny

(12:16) Willy Will- hey while we're waiting on our food do you guys wanna see a pic of El basically mentally abusing me this morning?

(12:16) Magic Mike- ?

(12:17) Eleven- WILLIAM BYERS DON'T YOU DARE

(12:18) Willy Will- (pic of El flipping him off this morning)

(12:18) Willy Will- ahh, the joys of trying to keep a streak going

(12:20) Eleven- I didn't even know you screenshot that! You ass lmao

(12:22) Eleven- u know what i still look cute even though i legit just woke up

(Mike & El)

(12:24) Noodle- hey did you sleep alright last night?

(12:24) El- oh yeah! definitely! for the last couple weeks i've had to deal with two screaming toddlers at night

(12:24) El- really fucked up my sleeping schedule

(12:26) Noodle- well that's good, and i bet. kids suck sometimes.

(12:26) El- fr lmao

(12:28) El- so wyd anyway?

(12:31) Noodle- me and dustin had a late breakfast and we're at the store grocery shopping for my mom. Then we're gonna cut my parents grass, front and back, and same for his mom.

(12:31) El- EW (to both)

(12:32) Noodle- ikr i hate grocery shopping

(12:32) Noodle- or any shopping in general

(12:33) Noodle- and my dad's too lazy to do anything so

(12:34) El- Sameee. I only like shopping for makeup but that's still rare lmao

(12:35) Noodle- lmao definite ew there

(12:35) Noodle- you don't need makeup

(12:27) Noodle- ur pretty without it :)

(12:27) El- Awe, ty! :) ur so sweet idk how they say you're abusive

(12:28) Noodle- No need to thank me, it's true. And I'm not, it's incredibly rare for me to get pissed off enough to hit someone. I love dustin but lord he's been getting on my nerves the last couple days

(12:29) Noodle- he's basically moved in at my parents house, on the couch, because his mom has like ten cats to take his place.

(12:32) El- omg lmao that'd be me but w dogs

(12:32) El- and ik the feeling i get abusive towards Will when he's being annoying

(12:33) El- Which is, quite frankly, all the fucking time.

(12:34) Noodle- LMAO I've never actually hit will willingly but he does annoy me too

(12:35) Noodle- we shared a room freshman year and he snores SO loud I couldn't handle it.

(12:35) El- i thought you could sleep through WW3?

(12:36) Noodle- No I can, it's just he always fell asleep before me and I couldn't fall asleep listening to my own personal lawnmower in the other bed

(12:37) El- oh lmao yeah he is loud af

(12:37 El- OMG my waffles are here ttyl!

"Enjoying your waffles over there, El?" Lucas asked. El had been dancing a little in her seat as she ate. She looked at him and grinned, nodding.

"Uh huh! That's not the only reason though." She let out a little giggle and Will looked at her weird.

"What the hell was that?" He asked. She shrugged.

"Did you guys know how sweet Mike is?" She asked, taking a sip of her water. Will choked, *again,* so Lucas smacked his back, *again.*

"El!" He exclaimed. "What the hell? You two have never even met face to face." She snorted.

"Did he compliment you again?" Max asked, wiggling her eyebrows.

"Uh huh. Told me I was pretty without makeup."

"He's in love." Lucas joked. El's cheeks turned a bit pink, but replied,

"I highly doubt that." She shook her head.

"Why?" Max asked, eyebrows raised. El shrugged.

"I'm just unlucky in love, ask Will, all my high school boyfriends failed miserably. And the few I've had since being in college? Jeez."

"They kinda did, but hey, I personally think you and Mike would make a good match. I totally ship it." El snorted, covering her mouth as she chewed. She shook her head, chuckling, and stood up.

"I'll be right back." She told them, heading to the bathroom.

"Guys." Lucas said seriously, causing the two to look at them. "I think Mike is actually a little in love with her. Not literally, but..."

"What?" Will asked, confused.

"Dustin texted me last night and told me something Mike said. Do you remember when Max forced Mike into telling us who his crush was a year or so ago?"

"That was like two years ago." Max said, defensively.

"Not the point, anyways, he didn't know her name and he's never actually talked to her, right?" The two shrugged. "He wouldn't tell us where he'd been seeing her, and now I know."

"Spill!"

"Mike told Dustin she worked at Benny's." He said, looking at them.

"And that he finally knew what her name was, because El sent him a picture last night."

"Holy shit, Mike has a crush on El!" Max almost yelled. Will shushed her quickly when an old couple looked at them.

"For *two* years?" Will asked, surprised. Lucas shrugged.

"I don't know man, but that explains why a lot of those blind dates didn't work out."

"Well," Max sat back, wiping her mouth with a napkin, "It's a good thing they're roommates, huh?" She wiggled her eyebrows again. "I'm *so* gonna set them up."

"Set who up?" El asked, sitting back down next to Will.

"You and Mike." Max replied, casually. El's eyes nearly bugged out of her head.

"Huh?"

"Yeah." Max shrugged and Lucas coughed, trying to hide back his laughter. El eyed him for a second, then turned back to Will.

"What? I ship it."

"What happened to all those blind dates you set him up on? Didn't they all not work out?"

"Yeah, but now we know why."

"Is he gay?" She actually sounded a bit sad. The three burst out laughing.

"El, I just said I'm gonna set you up with him. I'd set him up with a guy if he was gay, which he *isn't*." She blushed.

"Sorry, I had a brain fart."

"She's just in the honeymoon phase still." Lucas said. She gasped dramatically, throwing a balled up napkin at him.

"You're one to talk, Lucas! You and Max have been in that phase for the last five years!"

"We've only been together for two though?" Max looked at Will confused.

"My point exactly. You've been all lovey and gross for the last five years." She rolled his eyes and kicked him under the table. "It's true, El, when you meet Mike and Dustin tomorrow, ask them about *Lumax* and they will go into a *very* detailed interpretation of them when we were in high school."

"Lumax?" She asked, eyebrows raised. "Why not... Mucas?" Max and Lucas looked at her, and Will burst out laughing.

"Yeah, you and Mike are definitely gonna get together, one way or another." Max sighed, looking at Lucas, who just looked utterly defeated.

"Why?"

"Because that's what he called them." Will explained. "He still does, actually. We were joking one day after they got together, talking about possible ship names, and that was the first thing that popped into the poor guys head. We were also a little drunk, mind you, and he was like, "Will deepened his voice in an attempt to mock Mike's, "*Delicious Mucas making out.*" El stared at him before making a face, and then laughing.

"Oh wow, this is amazing." She said, grabbing her cup and drinking some water. "You guys are literally the highlight of my year." She said, seriously. They raised their eyebrows.

"Why's that?" Lucas asked.

"Well, for one, you guys are letting me *live* with you. Two, you guys are hilarious and so welcoming. I've never met anyone in a day and became friends with them so quickly, not to mention *live* with them, but, you know." She shrugged.

"Awe!" Max stood from her chair and hugged El, causing her and the two guys to laugh. "You're the highlight of my year, too." She said,

sitting back down. El chuckled.

"Why aren't you ever this affectionate with us?" Will asked. Max looked at him and rolled her eyes.

"One, me and her are gonna be best friends, and two, the only person I really have a soft spot for, other than Lucas, *occasionally,* is Mike."

"Oh, true."

"She and Mike hated each other at one point." Lucas said. "Still not sure why, but they did, and now they're joined at the hip when we're all together."

"Not true!" Max wiggled a finger in front of his face. "Yeah, we're best friends, but we are *not* joined at the hip. That's him and Dustin."

"Yeah, but that's just because Dustin's grateful for Mike because he lets him stay at his house during breaks." Will looked at El, who giggled at the small argument going on across from them.

"They always argue like that." He told her. "Usually about who's best friends with who, so you'll be hearing this pretty often." El smiled.

"I don't mind a bit."

Hawkins

5 PM

"I'm literally so tired." Dustin said, falling on Mike's floor as soon as he walked into the room. Mike, not expecting it, tripped and fell on top of Dustin.

"Idiots!" Holly yelled, laughing at them as she walked past. Mike just flipped her off and got up with a groan.

"I did more work than you did, asshat, how are you tired?" He said, plopping down on his bed.

"You know being in the sun makes me tired." Dustin replied. Mike

scoffed.

"You're just a big ass baby. A lazy one, at that." Dustin flipped him off.

"I'm gonna take a nap here." Dustin told him, rolling onto his back and putting his hat over his face. "Goodnight." Mike sighed and pulled out his phone, scrolling through Instagram and Twitter until he heard a snore. He looked at Dustin and rolled his eyes. He pulled up his camera and took a couple second video of him snoring, and said at the end,

"This motherfucker is actually asleep on my floor." He sent it to the group chat, and almost immediately they replied.

The Par-tayy

(5:23) Magic Mike- can y'all believe this fool?

(5:23) Magic Mike- (video)

(5:24) Stalker- that doesn't surprise me a bit.

(5:24) Zoomer- MIKEY BOY WHEN ARE YOU GUYS LEAVING?

(5:25) Magic Mike- mom is making us dinner and we're gonna watch a movie, then head out around 10:30

(5:25) Willy Will- why are you guys watching a movie after? Why don't you just leave right after dinner?

(5:27) Magic Mike- we're actually going to see some random movie with Holly. idk what it is i forgot

(5:27) Willy Will- Ohh makes sense

(5:29) Eleven- are you guys gonna go see IT when it comes out?

(5:30) Magic Mike- I want to see it sometime next week but idk

(5:31) Magic Mike- i sure as hell ain't going alone

(5:31) Stalker- oh yeah lmao, El, Mike's afraid of clowns.

(5:31) Magic Mike- I am not ashamed

(5:31) Magic Mike- have you SEEN the damn trailer?

(5:32) Eleven- I have to admit, it does seem pretty creepy but I want to see it. I loved the miniseries and the book

(5:33) Magic Mike- Same! I feel like the miniseries was a bit rushed though

(5:34) Eleven- I mean it kinda was. It's a big book. i think they should've like split it up into two movies, like one when they're kids, and another older

(5:37) Magic Mike- exactly. it was still good though, either way

(5:39) Magic Mike- anyways i gtg food's ready and i gotta wake this idiot up. talk to y'all later

(5:40) Zoomer- byeeee Mikey

(5:41) Willy Will- ^

(5:41) Stalker- ^^

(5:44) Eleven- Bye Noodle!

"El!" Max laughed, reading the text. "Jesus, I fucking love that name, man." She said, and El laughed along with her.

"Hey, he technically came up with it himself, I'm just going along with it." She shrugged. Max snorted.

"I know it's a little late, almost being six, but do you wanna go to the mall with me?" Max asked her. El shrugged.

"Sure, I need some more foundation." She said, grinning. Max nodded.

"Okay, I'm gonna go let them know and we'll leave." She told her. El nodded and went up to her room to get her shoes.

Hawkins

10 PM

"Mike-" Dustin started, but Mike interrupted him.

"We're *not* talking about this, Dustin." Mike said, keeping his eyes on the road.

"But-"

"*Dustin.*" He shut up after that and sighed, turning to his phone to keep him entertained.

He witnessed probably the biggest fight the Wheeler's have ever had tonight. Everything was going fine until Karen had asked Holly what moving the three were going to see, and Ted butted in, telling her she wasn't going because it was a school night. That resulted in Holly yelling at him and then going to her room, while Ted turned his attention to Mike and started yelling at him for trying to make her like him. He was drunk, and nothing he said really made sense, but Mike blew up at him and decided he wasn't going to live there anymore, *ever,* despite Karen's desperate pleas. That wasn't even the worst bit, but just thinking about it made Dustin want to cry. Dustin had helped Mike pack up almost everything he owned that he'd left there while at college, and pilled everything in the back of Mike's truck.

Now, they're on the two hour drive back to Chicago, the only sound being the music playing from the radio.

"Do you-"

"No, I don't want to talk about it, Dustin." He said harshly, glaring at him out the corner of his eye.

"I was just gonna ask if you wanted some gum." He replied, sounding almost childish. Mike sighed and ran a hand through his hair.

"I'm sorry, man. No, thanks. I just... that was the worst fight we've ever had." He shifted a little in the seat and continued. "I hate that it happened in front of you and Holly."

"Don't worry about that, dude, I was *about* to call him out on his shit, but I didn't wanna get kicked out again. It's not your fault anyways, everything he said was bullshit and you know it." Mike just shrugged. Dustin played around a little with the radio for a while after that, as well as playing a couple games on his phone. Mike scared him when he all of a sudden said,

"Happy birthday." Dustin looked at the time on his phone and noticed it was 12 AM. Immediately after Mike told him happy birthday, the rest of the party did too. Mike always made sure to tell him happy birthday first, and Dustin absolutely loved the fact.

"Thanks, buddy." Dustin grinned at him. "I'm legal now, whooo!" he yelled quietly, causing Mike to laugh.

Well, at least he's feeling better, even if it's just a little.

"I know I can't do much to make you feel better, but why don't we just blast the radio and sing along like idiots like we used to do?" Dustin suggested. Mike gave him a smile and nodded, turning the volume up. They looked at each other, grinning, when they realized what song it was.

"IT'S GONNA TAKE A LOT TO TAKE ME AWAY FROM YOU!" They screamed at the top of their lungs. "THERE'S NOTHING THAT A HUNDRED MEN OR MORE COULD EVER DO."

"I BLESS THE RAINS DOWN IN AFRICA!" Dustin screamed, his voice cracking with *every* word, causing Mike to laugh so hard he had to pull off on the side of the road.

"Jesus Christ." Mike said, chuckling, a hand on his stomach. "I needed that, man, thank you."

"Hey, don't thank me, thank my voice, which is still going through puberty." He replied, voice cracking with the last word. Mike snorted, but started on the road again.

"On the road again!" Dustin sang and, without looking at Mike, could tell he was being glared at.

"Don't *even* start singing that."

Chicago

1:30 AM

"Can you do me a favor and not tell anyone what happened tonight?" Mike asked Dustin as he pulled into the garage, hardly registering the silver Chevy Cruze he parked next to. "Ooh, nice." He added upon seeing it. Dustin snorted.

"Nah, I won't say anything. *You should*, though. You know Max is gonna suspect something, especially if she sees us drag everything up to your room." He told him.

"Which I definitely don't feel like doing. I'll deal with it tomorrow, or later if you wanna be technical." Dustin chuckled and nodded, grabbing their duffel bags out of the back seat and giving Mike's to him.

"Thank ya much." Mike mumbled, getting out of the truck and shutting the door. He walked up the steps, Dustin following, and smacked the button on the wall and unlocked the door as the garage door shut. He was almost knocked off his feet when he opened the door, the fiery redhead just *waiting* to attack him.

"Mike!" She screeched, latching onto him like a koala.

"Shh! El and Will are asleep!" Lucas shushed her, moving past them to hug Dustin and wish him a happy birthday.

"I missed you too, Max, but can you get off? I'm sore as fuck." He told her, still hugging her back. She dropped down and gave him a proper hug, and then did the same as Lucas, hugging Dustin while Lucas hugged Mike.

"Why are you sore? Are you okay?" She asked, snatching his bag off the floor and walking into the kitchen, setting it on the counter. He nodded.

"I'm gonna head up to bed, g'night guys." Dustin said, waving at him. They all told him good night and turned back to their conversation.

"We did a lot of shit today, well, I did *most* of it, because Dustin's a lazy fucker." Lucas snickered. "Went grocery shopping for my mom, then cut the grass and shit at his house, and then at mine because my dad is a lazy ass drunk who doesn't do anything. Which you guys already know." He plopped down in a chair at the island and leaned his forehead on the counter top. Max looked at Lucas, and eyebrow raised. She squeezed his shoulder and sat next to him.

"Did something happen?" She asked.

"Just the usual." He sighed. "Mom made the usual dinner before I leave, and Dustin and I were gonna go see that movie with Holly but dad yelled at her and started talking shit to me for wanting to keep her out late."

"The hell? You guys would have been back by her bedtime anyways." Lucas said, making a face.

"I know. And I feel bad that we didn't get to take her, because I promised, but..." He groaned and smacked his head on the counter a couple times. He definitely wasn't gonna tell them about him moving out yet, that's for sure. He sighed and sat up. "I'm gonna go to bed, I'm tired." He told them. They nodded.

"Okay, if you need us you know where to find us." Max told him. "And try to be quiet, El's asleep." He nodded.

"Goodnight guys." He walked up the stairs, bag over his shoulder. As quietly as he could, he opened the door. Everything was the same, other than the fact that his crush was asleep in the bed next to his. She was laying on her stomach, arms under her pillow, and the right side of her face squished against it. He noticed the fan in between their beds and grinned. He put his bag on the floor next to his bed and went to the bathroom to get ready for bed without disturbing her. But of course, the second he started to walk towards his bed, he tripped and knocked over a couple books from his desk, resulting in a loud crash.

"Fuck." He mumbled, hoping it hadn't woken her up. He leaned down to pick them up when he heard rustling, and figured she was just moving around to get comfortable, but then the lamp came on.

Goddammit

"You okay?" She mumbled, sitting up and rubbing her eyes before looking at him sleepily.

"Shit, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to wake you, go back to sleep. Go, go!" He shooed gently.

"But are you okay?" She repeated.

"Yeah, I'm fine." He gave her a small smile. "Go back to sleep." He told her. She nodded and turned off her lamp, which was the exact same one as his. She laid back down, getting comfortable. He let out a breath and put the books on his desk and quickly, yet *carefully*, took off his shirt and tossed it on his bag before getting in bed and pulling the covers over him. He moved around a bit, before sighing and enjoying the cool sheets.

"It's nice to meet you." He heard El mutter softly. He chuckled, a blush creeping up his neck.

"It's nice to meet you too, finally." He could almost hear the smile in her voice when she said,

"Nighty night, Mike." He grinned so wide his cheeks hurt.

"G'night, El."

---

5 AM

El certainly didn't expect to be woken up at two in the morning, especially by the cutest guy she'd ever seen. Yeah, after being a bit of a stalker, like Lucas, by stalking his Instagram, she decided he was the cutest guy ever. And the hottest. And the prettiest. *And* the sweetest.

She let out her usual groan, smacking at her phone until it shut off. She heard a soft snore from across the room and her eyes widened. She'd *almost* forgotten about the incident last night, and she was glad she didn't. She was also glad her alarm didn't wake him up. She smiled to herself, unplugging her phone and taking it in the

bathroom with her. She changed into her uniform, which was just a white T-shirt and black pants, brushed her teeth, and did her light makeup. She brushed through her hair and put it up in it's usual bun. She'd taken a shower last night so she wouldn't have to this morning

She tip-toed back into the room, and took a second to see how he slept, straight up starfish, his legs and arms stretched out to each corner of the bed, his head tilted to the side on his pillow. She noticed that he hadn't plugged his phone in, so she plugged it in for him, seeing his lockscreen. It was him and two girls, one being younger than him, with his arms around the both of them. She figured it was his sisters, and she smiled at the fact. She put her shoes on and picked up her bag, making sure her keys were in it, and headed out of the room, shutting the door gently.

When she got down the stairs, she automatically went into the kitchen and opened the freezer. Lucas had so graciously gotten her a box of eggos while he was shopping the other day, upon request by Max. She popped two of them in the toaster and grabbed a paper plate, and after opening a couple cabinets, found the syrup. She usually didn't put syrup on it, but she felt like it today. After making herself a cup of milk, she got the whipped cream out and put it on top of the eggos, along with the syrup, and sat at the island, enjoying her breakfast. There's a whiteboard on the fridge, so she grabbed the marker connected to it and wrote a note, saying,

Good morning (or afternoon, depending on who's getting up), I'm off to work and I'll be back around 3:30 or so. Have a nice day guys! xoxo, El 3

P.S. Happy birthday Dustin! :D

She smiled, happy with her note, and cleaned up her mess before locking the door of the garage, having gotten a key yesterday afternoon at the mall, and got in her car, but not without noticing Mike's truck and everything in the back.

Huh, I wonder what that's about.

She shrugged and hit the button on her keychain, and the door opened. She backed out into the road before closing it again, and was off to work.

Dustin was, shockingly, the first to wake up later that morning, at around 10 o'clock, and when he saw El's note, he grinned and ran upstairs, barging into Mike's room and jumping on him, who woke with a start, smacking Dustin as hard as he could.

"Hey! What was that for? It's my birthday!" He whined.

"Yeah, yeah, whatever. What is it?" He grumbled, pulling the blanket up to his chest.

"Oh!" He remembered what he was gonna say. "I love your girlfriend so much." Mike stared at him for a second, before punching him in the arm again.

"Fuck off, Henderson. She's not my girlfriend."

"Not yet." Dustin wiggled his eyebrows and Mike pushed him off the bed again, which, coincidentally, woke the other three up, and they came wandering into Mike's room, wondering what happened.

"Why the hell are you on the floor?" Will asked, flopping on El's made bed and going to sleep before anyone answered him. Max crawled up next to Mike and snuggled into his other pillow.

"All I did was come in here to confess my undying love for his girlfriend because she left a note telling us all good morning. And she told me happy birthday. This ass pushed me off the bed again. This is twice in two days!" He exclaimed dramatically.

"Dustin?" Lucas asked.

"Yeah?"

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"I don't know." Mike whined. "But I want all of you out unless you're gonna shut the fuck up."

"Alright, Mr. Grumpypants. I'll remember this." Dustin said, taking Lucas' outstretched hand and allowing him to pull him up.

"I'll remember it too, so when you wake up hungover tomorrow, I'll be sure to annoy the hell out of you." Mike retorted, flipping over so he was on his stomach and burying his face into his pillow. Max snickered and Mike nudged her with his foot. Dustin huffed and started towards the door. "Oh, and Dustin?" Mike called quietly.

"What?"

"Happy birthday." Dustin grinned again.

"Thanks, Buddy. Goodnight." He joked.

"G'night." Mike mumbled back, and fell asleep as soon as Dustin and Lucas left the room.

"I think he left a mark." Dustin said, gesturing to his arm as he and Lucas went downstairs for breakfast. Lucas rolled his eyes.

"I mean, if he did, you kinda deserved it. Imagine if you did that to Max, she'd probably kill you. Mike was too busy being half asleep to attempt it."

"You know what? You're right."

3. Chapter Three

Notes for the Chapter:

> Oof, sorry for such a long wait y'all. Life is just a bitch and I forgot to update xD

4 PM

"Look, dad, I only broke my middle finger, all is well." El said, holding her phone between her ear and shoulder as she attempted to unlock the garage door.

" *Only* your middle finger? El, Jesus Christ what did he do for you to punch him?" He exclaimed as she finally unlocked it and walked in, shutting it behind her. She heard laughter coming from the kitchen as she entered.

"He grabbed my ass. *And* he tried to grab my boobs. It was self - defense man!" She leaned against the door frame in the hall before going into the kitchen.

"Did he at least get fired?"

"Oh yeah, Benny fired him on the spot, even after I punched him. I'm pressing charges too."

"You'd better. Kid better be glad he's in Chicago because I'd be on his ass right now." She chuckled.

"I know, dad. Alright, let me go, I just got home."

"Alright, don't go around breaking anymore fingers or noses m'kay?"

"I won't. On the bright side, I can flip people off for no reason." Hopper snorted and she giggled. "Okay, I'll call you later. Love you."

"Love you too, ya badass." She snorted and hung up, tucking it in her pocket. The laughter in the kitchen had stopped for the most part, and Will met her in the doorway of the kitchen, arms crossed.

"What happened?" He demanded. She held up her right hand. "Jane Hopper, will you ever go three months without injuring yourself?" She shrugged innocently.

"Probably not. Now you can lecture me after I meet Mike and Dustin, m'kay?" She crossed her arms, giving him the same look. He snorted and nodded, stepping out of the way. Immediately, all she saw was a hat and curly hair as she was lifted up in a hug. "Holy shit!" She laughed, hugging him back.

"Hi El! It's nice to see you in person!" He exclaimed, letting her go and waving excitedly. She laughed again.

"You're gonna freak her out man, chill." Lucas said, nudging him.

"It's fine." She waved him off, smiling. "It's nice to meet you too, Dustin. Happy birthday." He grinned and turned to Mike, who'd been standing there awkwardly, a small smile on his face.

"Mike, I'll tell you again, I love your girlfriend." The look on Mike's face was priceless and El burst out laughing with the others as Mike chased Dustin, tackling him in the living room.

"I hate you!" Mike exclaimed, tickling Dustin's sides as he straddled him, Dustin thrashing wildly, laughing so hard he didn't make a sound.

"Ahh stop stop stop! I'm gonna piss myself!" He finally managed. Mike made a face and got off him.

"Pee on me and I'll murder you."

"Yeah, that's a little gross dude." El said, popping a piece of gum in her mouth. Mike gave her a smile, cheeks a bright red. She grinned at him and held her arms out. "I like this introduction a little more than the one this morning." She said, taking a couple steps towards him. He chuckled and awkwardly wrapped his arms around her and she hugged him back. Their's lasted a little longer than Dustin's, causing the other four to nudge each other grinning. They pulled away, Mike's cheeks still red, but El's were pink now.

"Wait, what do you mean the one this morning?" Will asked.

"Uh, I accidentally woke her up when I went to bed." Mike said sheepishly, pulling himself up on the counter and swinging his legs a bit.

"Michael." Max glared at him. "What did I tell you?"

"It's not like I did it on purpose. I freaking tripped and knocked some books off my desk." He said defensively. "I am sorry for waking you though." She waved him off.

"It's fine, it was funny." She said, "You looked like a kid that got caught with his hand in the cookie jar." Mike snorted.

"Felt like it. I was just like *fuck* ." She chuckled.

"So, care to explain the broken finger?" Lucas asked, joining Mike at the counter. El sat at the island with the other three.

"So, first off, we're hiring at Benny's if anyone needs a job." She started. "Well, I broke Troy's nose and got him fired."

"What'd he do this time?" Mike asked.

"Grabbed my ass and *tried* with my boobs too, but I punched him before he did. Benny fired him on the spot and I'm pressing charges for sexual harassment."

"Why in the *fuck* did that perv have to fucking follow us to Chicago?" Max grumbled. "If he ever does it again I'm gonna stick my foot so far up his ass he's gonna choke to death." Lucas snorted and El laughed.

"That's very..." Will made a face instead of continuing.

"Like you haven't heard it before." Mike rolled his eyes. "Do you have any idea how many times she's said that to *me* alone?" Will raised an eyebrow

"And you two are supposedly best friends?" El asked. Mike snorted.

"Don't let her bitchiness towards me fool you. She clung to me like a koala when we got back this morning." El laughed at the glare Max sent his way. He grinned cheekily.

"You ready to get fucked up tonight man?" Dustin asked Will, clapping him on the back. "We're gonna get you a man tonight."

"Whoa, hold up." El held a hand up. Everyone looked at her and she put a hand on her hip, pointing a finger back and forth between Will and Dustin. "I need to meet said man before you do *anything* else, got it?"

"Alright, mom. You're just jealous 'cause you haven't gotten any in a while." Will stuck his tongue out at her.

"You're one to talk." She replied smugly. "But you're right." She shrugged. "Nothing wrong with that." Max cackled and Dustin snickered at the face Mike made.

"You guys better get used to it, she's just as raunchy as Dustin and has no secrets to hide." Will said, walking off down the hall.

"He's right, I've got many a secrets. Speaking of no hidden secrets, I'm about to piss myself so..." She followed him down the hall but went in the bathroom instead.

"She's something else, huh?" Lucas asked, nudging Mike, who rolled his eyes.

"Shut up." Dustin wiggled his eyebrows at Mike for a literal minute straight, without stopping. Mike stared at him and saw out of the corner of his eye the way Max and Lucas looked at each other, grinning.

"You know, I'm never telling you any fucking thing again." Mike hopped off the counter and stalked off down the hall, down to the basement. Dustin frowned.

"I pissed him off, didn't I?"

"Ya think?" Max thumped him on the head and followed Mike, who was laying face down across the two bean bags. "Eh, what's up doc?"

"Not funny." He said, voice muffled by the beanbag.

"You're gonna suffocate."

"Don't care at this point."

"Oh come on, Mike, it's not that bad." He looked at her.

"Not that bad? Bullshit."

"Okay," She flopped down on top of him, laying on his back, on her back. He let out a grunt. "Tell me why it's so bad that you wanna suffocate."

"Well one, the fact that Dustin actually told you guys-"

"Actually, he told Lucas who told us."

"Mother fucker. I'ma kill your boyfriend."

"Don't be like that, Mike. Keep going."

"Don't you think it's a little embarrassing for me to have a crush on some girl I never even talked to for two years? Because I'm a wimp that can't fucking suck it up and ask her out."

"Well ask her out now. She seemed pretty happy that you called her pretty."

"She told you guys?" He asked and she could *hear* the blush on his face.

"Yep!" She said, popping the P. "Told us during lunch yesterday. Will ships it, and frankly, I do too."

"Jesus Christ. You guys aren't gonna let me live it down, are you?"

"Why don't you just ask her out?"

"We're roommates."

"Okay?"

"And she's Will's sister."

"So?"

"Sooo, it'd be weird and awkward as hell. She'd probably say no anyways." Max sighed.

"You *do* need to suck it up. You don't want to be alone forever, do you?"

"Like I told Dustin, I'm *not* gonna be alone forever. It's *just* a crush and it *will* pass."

"You've had a crush for two years, it's not going away that easily."

"It's not gonna be the beanbag that kills me, it's gonna be you if you don't get off." He grunted, shifting so she'd fall off him. She scowled at him but crossed her arms over each other and leaned on the beanbag his head was on.

"Look at me, Wheeler." She demanded. He looked up at her, hair falling in his face. " *You* need to man up. *You* need to stop being so insecure. *You* should know that she's pretty interested in you. Kept asking questions about you. Like's your music."

"She's heard my music?" He perked up at that and she chuckled, nodding.

"Yep, her old roommate dragged her to one of the concerts you and Dustin played at, but she ended up really liking it."

"Cool."

"I'm serious, you should ask her out. Or something, just talk to her a bit, see if you really like her and not just her *looks.* "

"I mean, it's not just her looks. She's fucking pretty as hell, but she's always nice when I see her at Benny's. Like even if she was having the worst day, she was still nice to everyone."

"You and her have that in common then." She patted his shoulder and stood up. "Quit pouting and let's go celebrate Dustin's birthday outside with cake." Mike glared at her but rolled off the beanbag and onto the floor. He held his hands up and she rolled her eyes, but pulled him up anyways. He grabbed his favorite guitar, the one that had stickers and permanent marker drawings all over it, courtesy of

his sisters and friends, and walked up the stairs behind Max, just as they heard El yell,

"You guys have a pool? Why the fuck didn't I know this?" She smacked Will as the two walked back in the kitchen.

"You've been living here three days already and you haven't seen the backyard?" Mike asked, confused. She looked at him and shook her head, crossing her arms and pouting.

Fuck, why is she so cute.

"Max was gonna show me the backyard Wednesday but she forgot, and I forgot, and I haven't thought much of it." She told him and followed him out the back door and to where there were a few chairs set up around a table. The others were getting stuff from inside the house. "I usually hate being outside sometimes because I fucking hate any kind of bug, even lady bugs." Sitting in one of the chairs, she turned to him and patted the chair next to her. He sat down, chuckling, and put his feet up on the table. "Aren't ladybugs supposed to be like good luck or something because if they are, then it's bullshit because anytime a lady bug comes around me I like, *hurt* myself." She rambled and he just smiled at her as she talked, waving her hands in the air. "We're not supposed to kill them either but I do because I don't want them crawling on me. Is it weird that I feel bad about killing bugs afterwards even though I hate them?" He laughed at the expectant look on her face. He shrugged, plucking a couple strings.

"I mean, I don't like bugs either, really, but I have no remorse for killing them. I don't bother them if they don't bother me, like bees or wasps."

"Oh, don't get me started on those! Jesus, if I'm ever outside and you hear me scream bloody murder it's because I saw one." She shivered.

"Are we talking about being scared of bugs? Because Mike is terrified of spiders." Will popped up out of nowhere, sitting across from El.

"Spiders are fucking disgusting little eight legged creatures that should have never existed."

"They're not that bad, Mike." Max rolled her eyes.

"Not that bad? The fuck you think about spiders? You just like them because you've been in love with every guy that's played Spider-Man."

"That doesn't make sense." Lucas said, putting a cake on the table. Dustin handed Mike a lighter, a grin on his face, and the pack of candles.

"When do I ever make sense, Lucas?" Mike asked, putting his feet back on the ground. "And why do I have to light the candles? I'm not the only one that knows how to use a lighter."

"Yeah, but you're the only one who doesn't burn themselves doing it. You've mastered it by now with your smoking." Max retorted.

"I'll have you know I haven't smoked in two months." He said proudly, sticking the *two* candle in the middle and adding the *one* next to it and lighting it.

"You smoke?" El asked, crinkling her nose. He shrugged, biting his lip.

"I used to, only when I was stressed."

"He couldn't go a day without one for a while freshman year." Will said.

"Yeah because you're snoring ass kept me up at night and it gave me something to do." Mike stuck his tongue out at him and El giggled. "Okay, blow 'em out before wax gets everywhere."

Saturday, September 9, 2017

"I hate my life." Max whined as she trudged into the living room at ten o'clock the next day. "Jesus Christ, what even happened last night?" Lucas was still asleep upstairs so she plopped on the couch next to Mike and cuddled into his side. El laughed from her spot in an armchair, computer in her lap.

"Well, what do you remember?" He asked, putting his phone down and wrapping an arm around her.

"The last thing I remember is Dustin taking three shots in a row while I took like, six or something."

"Damn." El snickered. "You party hard, huh?"

"Just wait til your birthday, Ella Bella."

"Ella Bella?" Mike asked. "What the hell."

"It's a nickname, Noodle, what the fuck else." He scowled at her. "And I just thought it and I like it. Anyways, it's gonna be lit, and then since Mike's birthday is New Years Eve, it's gonna be even better."

"Oh so you're the youngest?" El asked, grinning.

"Still the most mature." Max snorted.

"Sure. You're also very impatient. He was born a month early."

"Fuck off, Max." He acted like he was gonna push her off but she clung to him.

"No, you're warm."

"So is your boyfriend. Or go cuddle with Will or something."

"How do you know he's warm?" She wiggled her eyebrows.

"Common sense. Don't make this dirty." She snickered.

"Besides, Will's got someone to cuddle with already. Some dude named Blake." El made a strangled sound.

"He actually got some? You go Will." She fist bumped the air and giggled, going back to her computer. Max nudged Mike, noticing the smile on his face.

"Wait," Max looked back at El. "Don't you have to be at work at eleven?"

"Oh, yeah, Benny gave me the day off to recover." She said.

"Recover from what, exactly?" Will questioned as he walked down the stairs scratching his head, a blonde haired guy following behind him. He was only a couple inches taller than Will.

"This." She held up her middle finger and he flipped one right back and walked Blake towards the door.

"It was nice meeting you, Blake." Will told him.

"You too. Um, can I have your number? I'm not like some guy that just wants a one night stand." He scratched the back of his neck. Will chuckled and nodded, taking his phone and putting his number in it, texting himself to have the number. Blake left with a little dopey grin on his face, and Will shut the door and walked into the living room, laying on top of Max and tugging some of Mike's blanket off him.

"What's up with everyone attacking me today?" Mike grumbled, tugging the blanket back.

"You're warm." Will said. "And I think I'm still a little drunk."

"Nope, Max already used that excuse. Come up with something different." Will looked thoughtful for a minute or so and finally said,

"Nah, that's all I got." Mike rolled his eyes. "Where the hell is Dustin?"

"He's in the basement, passed out on the bean bags." El said, typing on her computer.

"Wait how do you know? We've been down here for like an hour." Mike raised an eyebrow. "I didn't see you go down there." She snorted.

"I'm very sneaky. And quick."

"Yeah, right." Will snorted. She scowled at him but grinned at Mike.

"I woke up around like four this morning and went to get something to drink. I heard bumping coming from down there so I went to see what it was. He was trying to play the drums so I took his drumsticks

and then he went to sleep."

"Jesus." Mike shook his head.

"Why does he keep calling me your girlfriend?"

"He did it with my last roommate." He told her, and as discreetly as possible thumped Max on the head while she snickered into the blanket. "He's determined to get me a girlfriend or something, I don't know." She chuckled and nodded.

"Will's the same way." She said, looking at him pointedly. "But he actually sets me up on blind dates and shit."

"They never work out though." He replied, glaring at her.

"Because none of your friends can handle a tiny ball of fury most of the time."

"Tiny ball of fury, huh?" Max asked, looking at Mike and wiggling her eyebrows. Thankfully, El didn't notice, and said,

"Yep. I'll beat someone's ass if I have to. Hence why I got this." She held up her hand and the three laughed.

"What are you doing over there?" Will asked, getting off of Max and sitting in the chair next to El, scooting it closer to look at it.

"Editing pictures." She said. "And making invites for the wedding."

"Oh, I forgot you were doing that." He snickered. Lucas came stomping down the stairs, a scowl on his face.

"What's with you?" Max asked. He saw her and his expression softened.

"For a minute I forgot you weren't here." He said. "Thought you didn't come home last night."

"Dude I literally dropped her on top of you at like two o'clock." Mike said, rolling his eyes.

"I know, but I was half asleep so I forgot. Also, thank you for going and getting them instead of making me do it."

"The only reason I did it is because you were knocked out and I was still awake." Mike pointed out, typing furiously on his phone. Lucas snorted and went into the kitchen.

"Did you pay the light bill?" He yelled.

"No, Lucas, the lights are obviously not on so of course I didn't- Yes I did you idiot!" Mike yelled back.

"I just woke up, fuck off."

"You fuck off, asshole." Mike mumbled.

If I threw this bitch out the window it wouldn't help me a bit, goddammit.

"Who are you texting?" Max asked.

"Nancy." He replied. El snickered and he glanced at her, chuckling.

"What?" Will asked.

"So you know how Mike is a deep sleeper?" El asked. They nodded. "Well, his phone is right next to his head, and Nancy called him but it didn't wake him up. It woke me up because I thought it was my alarm for some reason. It stopped ringing and immediately picked back up so I had to wake him up for him to answer it. She yelled at him so loud it scared him and he fell off the bed."

"Serves him right." Dustin mumbled as he walked in.

"Dustin, hey!" Mike said loudly.

"Ever heard of your inside voice, Michael?" Dustin scowled at him.

"I sure did! Ever heard of fucking off?" Mike grinned at him and Dustin flipped him off.

"Is Nancy texting you about moving out yet?" Dustin asked, sitting in the recliner. Mike froze, his thumbs just barely touching the screen of

his phone.

"Um-"

"Moving out?" Max nearly shrieked. "Excuse me?" She sat up, looking at him.

"Not from here." He mumbled.

"You're moving out of your parents house?" Lucas asked, looking at him over the island. Mike locked his phone and dropped it in his lap, sighing and running a hand through his hair.

"Yeah." He said, finally. "I was gonna tell you at some point but that dumbass had to run his mouth." Dustin stuck his tongue out at him.

"What happened to make you want to move out now?" Will asked.

"There's a lot of reasons for it, but just know I've been tempted to since before we even graduated." He said, picking his phone back up and unlocking it, texting Nancy back. "My dad is just an alcoholic asshole that has no respect for himself or anyone else, so, he decided to call me a disappointment in front of Dustin, only because I wanted to take Holly to see a movie before we left." He shrugged like it was no big deal. "Now Nancy's bitching at me about mom calling her and crying because of it. If mom actually gave a shit, she'd have done something about him before now."

"Mike-" Max started but he held a hand up, shaking his head.

"I know I'm not a disappointment, you don't have to tell me. I'm fine, guys, really. I've dealt with it for as long as I can remember, it doesn't bother me." He stood. "I'm gonna go take a shower." Without another word, he went upstairs. Everyone was silent, staring at the empty staircase.

"Well..." El bit her lip. "That's...unfortunate?"

"I'm gonna kill that mother fucker one of these days." Max nearly growled.

"How much you wanna bet he's hanging out the bedroom window

smoking?" Dustin said, taking his phone out of his pocket and playing around on it.

"Don't jinx it, jeez." Will grumbled. "You guys need to chill. Pushing him to talk about shit just stresses him out, like back in high school."

"Ugh, I'm a terrible friend." Dustin pouted.

"I don't think you're a bad friend." El said, shutting her laptop and putting it on the table. "I just think you should think a little more about what you say, depending on the situation. I was the same way when I was younger, I dealt with a lot of crazy shit before I was adopted and some people would blurt out things and trigger something in me. I guess that's what it is with Mike." She stood. "I'm gonna go make sure he's not murdering his lungs in our bedroom." As she walked up the stairs, Will watched her with a knowing smile.

"I'm so fucking happy she's my sister." He said, giggling a little. Lucas rolled his eyes at that.

Yep, still drunk.

"I mean, she's right though." Max said. "We have kinda always done that, to each other. I'm assuming the only reason you said anything was because of the hangover and the fact that you forgot we didn't know?" She asked Dustin, who nodded sheepishly.

"Yeah...I figured he'd have told you by now but I guess not."

"Better late than never, I guess." She shrugged. "But that asshole can suck a dick."

"Agreed."

Mike had left their bedroom door open, and was in fact, leaning out the window, smoking a cigarette.

I'm not gonna say anything about him smoking to the others. Don't wanna be a snitch and make his cute ass mad at me. Wait, he does have a cute ass.

She blushed lightly at the thought and walked in, plopping down at

the head of her bed and sitting criss cross, facing him. She didn't say anything, but she knew he knew she was there, as he glanced at her a couple times. He smoked half the cigarette before putting it out against the windowsill and put it back in the pack. He sighed and put the window down, scratching his head and falling face first into his own bed. She chuckled.

"You okay?" She asked. He said something but it was muffled. "Dude, I don't think anyone could decipher what the hell you just said." He lifted his head up and snorted.

"I don't even know what I said." He replied, rolling onto his back and sitting up, crossing his legs like hers. "But I'm good. A little irritated, but good."

"I understand." She said. He raised an eyebrow at her. "You know, friends telling your other friends something you weren't ready to talk about yet. That's one of the main reasons I didn't have any friends until Wednesday. You know he's sorry, right?" Mike sighed.

"Yeah, I know. I just don't...like talking about it, you know? It doesn't really matter who I'm talking to." He shrugged.

"I understand that, too, trust me. I was in a bad place before I was adopted, and I hate talking about it."

"With your real parents?" She hesitated, but nodded. "Shit, sorry, you just said you hate talking about it."

"It's fine. My birth mom died when I was young and my birth dad was abusive. Physically, mentally, emotionally, you name it."

"Wow, I'm sorry." She waved him off.

"It's not your fault, don't apologize. Just, talk to them. Max is ready to drive back to Hawkins and murder your dad, I think, and the other three are probably thinking about it too. I can see that they love you and I haven't even known you guys a week, I've barely known you for two days." He looked down at his lap, biting his lip. "And if you ever wanna talk I'm here. Will used to tell me that I should be a therapist or something but..." She shrugged. He chuckled.

"Thanks. You would make a good therapist though." She giggled and shrugged again. If you ever need to talk, I'm here too." He told her. She smiled brightly.

"I might take you up on that offer." She winked and he snorted. "Okay, we should probably go back down before they think we're making out or something. Will always assumes shit like that. Oh, and Dustin tried to bet that you were up here smoking out the window." Mike's cheeks turned red at the first comment, and then his eyes widened at the smoking comment.

"Seriously? What the hell!" He rolled his eyes and stood up as she started towards the door. She grinned at him.

"Don't worry, I'm not a snitch."

Thursday, October 5, 2017

7 PM

Just ask her out, idiot. Stop being a bitch and ask her out.

Mike was lying on his bed, guitar lying next to him, as he'd been practicing a little for he and Dustin's show next week. The quarter started last Monday, and one of he and Dustin's professors, who insisted his students just call him Zack, had scored them a slot for the concert next Friday. Everyone's already busy as hell with classes, as some professors were ruthless and didn't waste anytime. El already had a project due in two weeks, as did Lucas and Max, and Will had a couple essay's he had to write about other artists and shit, Mike didn't know exactly.

Anyways, back to the point. He's been lying in his bed for the last thirty minutes, contemplating whether or not he should actually ask El out. She was lying on her stomach on her bed, editing pictures and typing random words every once in a while, presumably for invites to the wedding. The two have become closer over the last month, almost attached at the hip, not nearly as close as he and Max usually were, but close. He finally got the courage to ask her when she spoke first, asking,

"I've been living here for like a month now, when is rent due?" He closed his mouth, mentally cursing himself. He bit his lip and looked over at her. She was looking over her shoulder at him, a couple loose hairs sticking out of her bun.

"Whenever you can pay it." He shrugged.

"Okay... Well, how *much* is rent? We haven't even discussed that part." He chuckled.

"Uh, one hundred? It's what everyone else pays each month. My grandparents always make sure I have money in the bank to pay bills and such, but will *not* pay for Wi-Fi for anything. It doesn't matter how much I try to convince them, they won't do it." She looked at him, eyes wide. "What? Is that too much? I can lower it-"

"No, no, it's fine! I just expected it to be like, my entire check or something."

"Oh." He chuckled. "Nah, no more than that and we're good to go. It's just to help with the Wi-Fi and groceries for the month." He told her. "I add like two hundred a month to the groceries because everyone else loves expensive shit."

"Oh, do they just give you money randomly too?" She asked. He shook his head.

"I, uh, I write short stories?" He said, but it came out as a question. "I don't know why I said that like it was a question, it's a statement. I write short stories and get paid for it. I don't do it often, it's really just when I finish writing something."

"So like, you get an idea, write it down and in a couple weeks a short story pops out? And they pay you for it?" He nodded. "That's awesome! I didn't know you were a writer!" He shrugged, sitting up.

"Eh, me writing all those campaigns for D and D got me into it, really." He said. "I'm not that good."

"You probably are. Can I read one?" She asked. He bit his lip and thought about it.

Eh, it wouldn't hurt.

He shrugged and rolled off his bed, going over to his drawer and opening the bottom one, grabbing the first stapled stack of paper out of the three rows. He tossed it to her and she caught it, rolling over onto her back and sitting up.

" *I'll Walk.* " She read, looking at him, an eyebrow raised. He shut the drawer with his foot and plopped back down on his bed again, grabbing his guitar.

"I get a lot of my inspiration from songs. That was one of the first stories I wrote, and it's based off of the song by Bucky Covington. I just heard it on the radio one day and it just happened." He shrugged again.

"Huh." She flipped open the front page. "This definitely isn't a *short* story." She gave him a pointed look. He snorted and shrugged yet *again.*

"Most of 'em are pretty long." He told her. "And based off a lot of country songs, now that I think about it." She chuckled.

"Nothing wrong with that, I don't particularly *love* country music but it's not bad, at least not some of the older stuff like this song." He nodded in agreement. It was silent for a bit after that, the only sounds were El flipping page after page. She hardly noticed as he started practicing again, and was probably five or six pages through by the time he finished the first song, her eyes glued to the paper.

"GUYS! FOOD IS HERE!" Max yelled at the top of her lungs. El didn't even react. Mike chuckled and stood, tapping her on the shoulder. Her head snapped towards him so quickly, she probably could've gotten whiplash.

"Huh?"

"Food's here." He told her.

"Oh." She pouted and put the story on her bed, sticking a pen that was on the table next to her where she stopped reading. "It's so good!" She gushed as the two walked downstairs. He blushed.

"What's so good?" Will asked, mouth full of chicken.

"Mike's story *I'll Walk* !" She said, bouncing on the balls of her feet. "He let me read it and I'm like half way through already. It's *amazing.* " She grinned at him and grabbed a plate, filling it with KFC.

"They really are." Will nodded in agreement, taking another bite out of a chicken leg.

"Awe, look at his blush!" Max pinched Mike's cheeks and he swatted at her, rolling his eyes. He grumbled under his breath as he fixed his own plate. They all sat in the living room to watch TV as they ate, and El was practically stuffing her face.

"Are you starving or just in a hurry?" Lucas asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Both." She said, glancing at him. She was the first one finished, so she cleaned her plate and ran upstairs, grabbing the story and running back downstairs. She plopped back down in her spot between Mike and Will and started reading again, ignoring everyone else. Dustin snickered at Mike's blush and he flipped him off.

"She hasn't blinked in five minutes." Dustin said, watching her, an eyebrow raised. "I mean, damn dude, I know you're a good writer and all but she's *into* it." Mike snorted and shrugged. A few more minutes went by and she sniffed, flipping the last page closed. She looked at him, eyes watery.

"You're fucking awesome. You made me cry and I never cry." She stated.

"it's true, she never cries." Will piped up.

"Like you wrote the actual fight at the beginning and then when she got hit, and then when he walked into the hospital and just... ugh, how?" She wiped at her eyes with her sleeves and leaned into him, wrapping her arms around his waist. His eyes widened for a second but hugged her back.

"Uh, thanks?" He said, making a face.

"You're welcome." She mumbled. Dustin snickered and Mike flipped him off. "Wow, Max wasn't wrong. You are warm." Mike snorted at that and shrugged.

"That's not even the saddest one." Lucas told her, taking a sip of his drink. Her eyes widened.

"There are happy ones though, right?" She asked, letting go of him and looking at him. He nodded.

"I've got a bunch of stories in that drawer." He told her. "You can read any of 'em anytime you want."

"You won't let us read them all." Dustin pouted.

"Yeah, because I know you guys would make fun of me for some of them, and she doesn't know me well enough for that."

"Okay, true." Max said. " *But* I make fun of you for your height on a daily basis you fucking giraffe. I wouldn't make fun of your stories." She rolled her eyes. He flipped her off. El laughed and stood up, taking the story with her.

"I'll be back." She said, running *back* up the stairs.

"Don't fall down the stairs again, El!" Will yelled.

"Fuck *off* William!" She yelled back. There was a thump and, "Fuck!"

"She fell." Will said, sighing.

"No I didn't! I stubbed my toe asshole!"

"You two yell a lot." Lucas said.

"Are you just now realizing this?" Mike asked, making a face at him. His phone dinged and he checked it. He sighed and looked at Dustin. "Really?"

"What?" Max asked.

"Nothing." He muttered, unlocking his phone and texting him back.

(Dustin & Mike)

(7:41 PM) Dusty- have u asked her out yet? is that why she's all lovey?

(7:42) Mikey- first off, she's not all lovey. second, no, i haven't. i was about to earlier but before i could she asked about rent

(7:42) Dusty- LMAO she's all lovey. bet she likes u. anyway, y didn't you ask her after?

(7:43) Mikey- lost it

(7:43) Mikey- it as in all fucking courage for it

(7:44) Mikey- i spent like 30 mins trying to get the courage to ask her and lost it. fml

(7:45) Dusty- poor mikey. maybe next time!

(7:45) Mikey- *middle finger emoji*

Dustin snickered and put his phone on the table. Mike flipped him off for real.

"Speaking of IT." Dustin said, waving his hands, "We haven't gone to see IT yet. Is it still in theaters?"

"Yeah!" El yelled. She came back down, grinning. She had Mike's hoodie on. Mike snorted and shook his head. Yeah, she's also started stealing *that* now that he's pulled it out. She walked all the way back down and went in the kitchen. "It's still in theaters until Saturday I think." She said, grabbing a water bottle out of the fridge.

"You guys wanna go see it tomorrow?" Max asked. They shrugged. "El, do you know what the movie times are?"

"No but I can look." She sat back down and pulled her phone out of Mike's hoodie.

"My birthday is gonna suck." Lucas said randomly.

"Why?" Will asked.

"Because it's on a Friday this year. And it usually sucks when it's on a Friday."

"Boo hoo." Max mocked crying. "You're just using it as an excuse not to drink." He stuck his tongue out at her.

"Why don't you and Mike like drinking?" El asked, typing on her phone.

"Mine's simple. Dad's an alcoholic. Don't wanna be like him." Mike shrugged. She looked at him for a second and bit her lip, then turned back to her phone.

"And I just don't like the hangover, basically." Lucas said.

"I like drinking, *sometimes,* but I'd rather do it at home or something." She said. "Oh! There's one at eight tomorrow night."

"You guys wanna go?" Dustin asked, grinning. They all agreed. "How much do you guys wanna bet that Mike will run out the first time the clown shows up." Mike stared at him for a couple seconds, and threw a throw pillow at him, smacking him in the face.

4. Chapter Four

Friday, October 6, 2017

9 PM

"I'm honestly surprised Mike hasn't flipped the fuck out yet." Max said, leaning forward and looking at Mike, who was sitting between Lucas and El. They were about an hour into the movie. He reached around Lucas and tugged on a piece of hair. She threw a piece of popcorn at him. It landed in his lap so he picked it up and popped it in his mouth, grinning at her.

"Why does that Richie kid look like Mike?" Lucas asked.

"He doesn't look like me." Mike made a face at him.

"Dude, yes he does. If he didn't have glasses, he'd look just like you but young."

"Yeah, the frog version of you." Dustin commented. Shockingly, and thankfully, they were the only people in the theater, so they could talk freely.

"Mike's *still* a frog." Will said.

"I thought I was a giraffe." Mike flipped him off and he snorted. The movie wasn't that bad, yeah, the clown was creepy as fuck and he'd probably have nightmares over it, but overall it was pretty funny.

"Shh!" El smacked their shoulders and kept her eyes glued to the screen. She had her feet propped up on the seat in front of her, and was almost laying down, which looked uncomfortable, but according to her, it'd been the most comfy she'd ever been in a movie theater. Mike just snorted and offered her popcorn, which she gladly accepted.

When the movie was over, they went to Waffle House, where Lucas and Dustin had tried to scare Mike by popping out from behind the car, as he and El rode in his truck together, which resulted in them both getting smacked and a laughing El. They ordered their food,

talking about the movie and Lucas' birthday. When their food arrived, El danced in her seat happily, taking a bite out of her waffles.

"Why is El the girl who sings about chicken and waffles?" Lucas asked. Mike snorted and slapped a hand to his mouth, laughing.

"She totally is."

"Man, I want chicken now!"

"I think we have left over chicken from last night." Dustin said. El grinned and gave him a thumbs up.

Mike and El were once again alone on the ride home, the only sound being the music on the radio. El was lip syncing and doing little dances every once in a while, making him laugh. Watching her with a smile, he asked,

"Hey El?" She looked at him, frozen in place. "Um, do you...Do you have any song suggestions for the concert Friday?"

Fuck. You're such a fucking wimp, Wheeler, get yourself together.

"Oh!" She faltered for a second, then grinned. "Funhouse by Pink." She said, He couldn't help but roll his eyes at that.

"Is it because of the clowns?" He asked.

"No." She replied innocently. "I just like the song."

"Uh huh, sure." She just laughed, going back to her dancing.

Friday, October 13, 2017

Lucas was wrong about his birthday, it turned out to be one of the best ones he'd had. He had a *great* wake up call from Max, and Will made the three breakfast, since El was working and Mike and Dustin had classes at nine and eleven. Like with Dustin, El had written him a small birthday message on the whiteboard on the fridge. They watched his favorite movies until Mike and Dustin got home.

"Happy birthday!" They yelled in unison, walking in with a shit ton of

balloons in each hand. Dustin had a toy flute and was making as much noise with it.

Where the fuck did he even get that thing?

Lucas laughed as he stood up and hugged the two, thanking them.

"You guys need to get ready, we're going to eat lunch at Benny's while she's on her break." Dustin told them. Twenty minutes later, they were in Mike's truck, singing along to the radio at the top of their lungs. When they got to Benny's, El already had their food and drinks at a table, waiting on them.

"Happy birthday!" She did jazz hands and hugged him. He snorted.

"Thanks, El." He grinned at her. They sat down and ate their lunch, talking about classes so far.

"I'm taking pictures at the concert." El said. "For my project. Or well, *a* project"

"What's the project about?" Will asked.

"Well, it's kinda two projects. Jamie said she wanted us to take a shit ton of pictures of stuff that make us happy and make a slideshow. Both projects are of that but the one due next week is basically just to check on us but it's a separate project. I don't know, she's confusing but I love her. The main project is due at the end of the year."

"How many pictures do you have so far?" Max asked.

"Like twenty I think." She said, "I'm a procrastinator hard core." She shrugged and took a sip of her drink.

"Jane!" Someone yelled. El scowled and turned around in her seat.

"Fuck *off* Kali." She griped. "You know I hate that name." A short girl with long purple hair walked over, grinning widely.

"You love it."

"I really don't." Kali pulled up an extra chair and sat down, stealing

one of her fries.

"Hey Will." She waved a few fingers at her.

"Who the hell are you?" Dustin asked, making a face.

"My sister."

"Sister?" Mike, Dustin, Lucas and Max said in unison.

"I don't see a resemblance." Max said.

"Not biological sisters." El said.

"Hey Mike." Kali grinned at him. He sighed.

"Hey Kali." He mumbled.

"You two know each other?" El asked, confused.

"Sadly." Mike said as Kali said,

"Gladly." And gave him a pointed look. "We technically work together. I edit his stories and make fun of him when he spells easy words wrong."

"I'm sleep deprived have the fucking time, I'm not an idiot."

"Yeah, he had all A's in middle and high school." Lucas said.

"I write more at night so." He shrugged. "Wait, why are you defending me, you make fun of me for typos when I text." He rolled his eyes as Lucas snorted.

"Hey, no bashing the birthday boy." Max pointed her fork at him and he flipped her off.

"Happy birthday." Kali said. He smiled at her. She turned to look at Mike and Kali, who were both giving her annoyed expressions. She snickered.

"So, are you two *just* roommates or?"

"Just roommates." They said quickly.

"Oh my God they were roommates." A female voice said. Mike snorted and turned to look where the voice came from. She sat a couple tables away with another girl. Her hair was short, about shoulder length and dark brown. From what he could tell, her eyes were brown and overall she was pretty. She looked at him and smiled, giving him a tiny wave. He grinned and waved back. She gave him a wink and he chuckled, turning back around.

"You two were literally just flirting without saying anything." Dustin said, and Mike noticed everyone looking at him. He blushed.

"Quit staring at me." He grumbled, sinking down in his seat and stabbing his plate.

"Mikey's got a girlfriend! Mikey's got a girlfriend!" Lucas and Dustin started chanting. He sighed and shook his head, stabbing the plate again.

"Chill dude, you'll break the plate." El said, giving what she hoped looked like a real smile.

I shouldn't be jealous, it's not like he actually likes me back. Oh, and we're not even together.

"Sorry." He mumbled. "Dustin, if you don't shut the fuck up, I'm gonna trip you on stage later." Dustin just snickered. "I've gotta use the bathroom, I'll be back." He stood up and made his way to the bathroom, but not before noticing the girl from a few minutes ago had disappeared but her friend was still at the table.

"My friend thinks you're cute." She told him as he walked past her.

"She's pretty cute herself." He said, hopefully loud enough for his friends to hear. He heard someone-probably Max- gasp and start laughing. He continued on to the bathroom. He did his business and washed his hands, looking in the mirror. He sighed and ran a damp hand through his hair.

Maybe I could fall for this girl and finally get over El? Ugh, that makes me sound terrible but I know she doesn't like me back so...

He dried his hands completely and left the bathroom, only to walk right into the girl, who let out a tiny shriek.

"Oh my God, I'm sorry." He said, stepping back a couple times. She put a hand over her heart.

"You scared me is all." She said, laughing. She held her hand out. "I'm Abigail. You're... Mikey, I suppose?"

"Uh, yeah." He shook her hand. "I go by Mike though, they do it just to annoy me." He couldn't help but roll his eyes at them.

"My friend Adriana is the same way. I don't know if she said anything to you, but if she did, I'm sorry." He chuckled and shrugged.

"She told me you thought I was cute." He said slyly, grinning when her cheeks turned a bright shade of red. "Don't worry, I told her you were cute too." Her eyes widened a bit and she blushed harder, giggling a little.

"Thank you. Um, can I have your number? I have to go and get ready for the concert tonight and I'd love to see you again."

"Sure." He took her phone and put his number in and texted himself. "You'll actually be seeing me sooner than you think, I'm performing with one of my friends too." She gasped a little.

"Really?" He nodded. "I can't wait! I'll see you then, then!" He smiled at her and she rushed off. He walked back over to his table, noticing that El was gone. He made a face but shrugged.

"Did you get that girls number dude?" Dustin asked. He grinned and nodded.

"Hell yeah, her name's Abigail. She's performing at the concert too."

"What about El?"

"What about her?"

"I thought you were trying to ask *her* out?" Max said. Mike shrugged.

"I don't know guys, maybe this is a good thing. I mean, this girl might actually like me, El doesn't. Not like that at least."

"You're so fucking oblivious, Mike." Will rolled his eyes. "El is jealous, that's why she went back to work early." He nodded towards El, who was taking some guys' orders and specifically looking in a different direction than their table. Mike sighed and shrugged.

"I *highly* doubt that. Anyways, maybe this'll be a good way to get over her. A two year crush is fucking ridiculous."

Despite being a little annoyed and ticked off about this Abigail girl, she learned her name from Kali before she left, she wasn't jealous. She shouldn't be jealous, it's not like he liked her back or that they were even together, so it wouldn't be right.

Here's the thing, El's only been with a few guys in her life, and her most recent boyfriend had been the love of her life...but something happened. Something she tries her best not to think about, and as the anniversary of that thing gets closer, her mood changes quickly. She knew she liked Mike, she knew she was *falling* for him, but she didn't want to, not one bit, so, deciding that since he's gotten himself a girlfriend now, she'd distance herself from him to get rid of this *crush.*

She still took pictures at the concert, avoiding Mike and this Abigail who had found him almost immediately after he and Dustin's performance. Not to say she didn't take pictures of him, she did. More of him than anyone else, only when he was alone or with one of the guys. She took a shit ton of pictures of them on stage, a short video of them singing Funhouse and another video of them forcing Lucas on stage and singing happy birthday to him.

Tuesday, November 7, 2017

"I *really* hope Mike doesn't actually fall for this girl." Dustin sighed, leaning back on a bean bag.

"Huh?" Max asked. "Shouldn't you be happy for him?" The two had already gone on a couple dates since Lucas birthday and texted constantly, but neither had really stated if they were officially

boyfriend and girlfriend.

"Dustin has a plan." Lucas said, rolling his eyes. The three were messing around in the basement, drinking a couple beers after classes, Mike and El were probably upstairs in their room, not talking to each other, and Will was out with Blake, who he'd apparently been dating for the last month, on the down low, as he said. El definitely hadn't been happy with the Abigail thing, and she didn't really speak to Mike much anymore. Only when he spoke to her or if she needed something.

"What did you do, Dustin?"

"Mike isn't exactly her type." He said, wiggling his eyebrows. She looked at him.

"She's lesbian, isn't she?"

"Somewhat." he shrugged. "She's bi, but she likes girls a lot more than guys."

"So she's lesbian."

"*No.* She likes dick and boobies just not at the same time."

"What the actual fuck Dustin." She said, pinching the bridge of her nose. "So what is your plan? Honestly, tell me so I can get rid of it."

"No, no, it's a good-ish plan, Max." Lucas told her. She scoffed.

"Doubt it."

"We're using Abigail to make El jealous."

"There's no *we* to it, because if this all goes downhill, it's on you." Lucas said, shaking his head. Dustin rolled his eyes.

"Anyways, she does think Mike's cute, but she has a girlfriend. Adriana, the girl she was with." He explained. "And Adriana is completely on board because she knows Abigail won't get too into the relationship."

"So what do you expect to happen, Dustin? For Mike to not fall for this girl and be fine if they date for a while and then break up? And what if he finds out, he'll be pissed at the both of you. Oh, and not to mention El isn't exactly talking to him *already*. He'll be hurt, and the chances of him and El actually getting together won't happen."

"I didn't think about that."

Meanwhile, Mike and El were on their beds, notebooks and textbooks in front of them, when Mike asked,

"Hey, uh, El?"

"Hm?"

"Did I do something to make you mad?" He asked. Her heart lurched at the way his voice sounded. He sounded so innocent. "I just... You used to talk to me a lot but now you've distanced yourself and if I did something to hurt you, I'm sorry."

Yeah, you're dating Abigail- Ugh, don't think like that. He's not yours.

"You didn't do anything, Mike." She told him honestly. "It's all me. I just don't want Abigail to think you're cheating or anything with me, since we're roommates." She thought of that vine and cussed at herself for it immediately after.

"What? No, she knows there hasn't been anything between us."

You sure about that?

"On our first date I told her that me and you were like best friends, despite the fact we've only known each other for a few months, and that she didn't have to worry about that." El nodded.

"I'm sorry." She muttered, looking down. "I'm not doing too well emotionally right now either so that isn't helping anything." He didn't say anything for a couple seconds, so she figured he just went back to studying, but then he said,

"Um, are you okay? I- Well, obviously you're not but... What happened? You don't have to tell me. It's none of my business." He

ducked his head as she looked over at him. She smiled a small smile.

"I'm okay, I guess. Something happened a couple years ago and the anniversary is coming up in two weeks and it still hurts." She shrugged. "I'll tell you about it one day but..."

"I understand." He said, "You don't *have* to tell me, but if you ever want to or just need someone to talk to...I'm always here."

"I know." She smiled. "Thank you. I'm sorry I haven't been talking to you."

"Nuh uh, don't apologize. It's fine." He stood up. "I'm gonna get something to drink, do you want anything?" He asked.

"Uh..." She bit her lip. "A coke?"

"Gotcha. I'll be back in like two minutes."

Two minutes turned into at least ten, and when he came back up, his whole demeanor had changed.

I'm gonna kill that mother fucker one day.

"You okay?" El asked as he handed her her drink.

Oh yeah, I'm fine. My supposed best friend set me up with a fucking lesbian to make you jealous, but I'm fine.

"Yeah, I'm good. Just stubbed my toe like a jackass." He joked, giving her a smile.

I'd be somewhat okay with it if I knew about the plan and if it would actually work, but it's not.

"You sure?" She asked. He nodded.

I just need to have a chat with Abigail and see what she says about it.

He flopped on his bed and pulled his phone out, going into his texts.

(Mike & Abigail)

(4:47 PM) Mike- Hey Abby?

(4:48) Abigail- Yes?

(4:50) Mike- ik i prob asked you like two days ago but are you free Fri?

(4:51) Abigail- Yeah! What do you have in mind?

(4:52) Mike- eh maybe just grab dinner and go to the park for fireworks?

(4:53) Abigail- sure! I can't wait! 3

Friday, November 10, 2017

"Are you okay?" Abigail asked, looking up at him. She was nowhere near as short as El, at around five eight. They walked hand in hand through the park, and where he was usually talkative on their dates, he'd been quiet.

"Uh, no, actually. I need to talk to you." She frowned and nodded, gesturing to an empty picnic table. They sat across from each other and Mike bit his lip.

"You're telling me you don't want to date anymore, aren't you?" She asked. He looked at her.

"Actually, no. You know how we aren't *official* with everyone else?" She raised an eyebrow and nodded. "I want you to be my *fake girlfriend* and not just a fake date or whatever." Her eyes widened at that.

"What are you talking about?"

"Dustin and his plan." He shrugged. "I heard him talking to Max and Lucas on Tuesday so I figured I'd just help make it seem like their plan is actually working."

"Mike, I'm *so* sorry-"

"No, don't worry about it. I understand you're just trying to help. I'm

not mad." He shook his head, taking one of her hands in his. "Not at you, at least. I'm gonna give it a little while longer just to see what happens and then I'm gonna hand it to him."

"Don't beat him up too bad." She joked. He chuckled.

"So what do you say about the fake girlfriend thing? I mean, if you want to, we can just stop."

"I wasn't lying when I said you were cute and I liked you, Mike." She told him honestly. "You are, and if El can't see that then it's her loss, because in the month I've known you, you're possibly the best straight guy friend I've ever had." He snorted at that. "I'll be your fake girlfriend. And I certainly hope that Dustin didn't tell your friends that I like boobies more than dick the way he said it to me when I talked to him." He looked away, holding in a laugh. "Oh my God! He did, didn't he?" Mike laughed and nodded.

"He did, the dumb fuck." He shook his head. "And we, by all means, *don't* have to do all the hand holding and kissing and cuddling shit if you don't want to, you already know I'd rather do it with El- Wait, that sounded wrong." She giggled.

"I know what you mean. She's hot." She winked. "And I don't mind doing that, I want to be an actress, remember?"

"Right."

"And Adriana knows that I might be kissing you, and she wouldn't be opposed either, she told me you were hot too."

"Has she seen me?"

"Mike!" She smacked his arm. "You *are* hot, but my lovely girlfriend is *hotter*."

"I'd agree but I'm not sure if you'd slap me or not."

She snorted and rolled her eyes.

"I wouldn't since I agree and I know you've got the hots for someone else." She glanced to the left and stood up, pulling him with her.

"Your friends are over there and I think they're watching us." She whispered to him before pulling him closer and planting one right on the lips.

"Holy shit!" He faintly heard Dustin shriek. "Get it Mike!" Abigail pulled away from him and he blinked, tilting his head a bit.

"Your lips are so soft." She told him, giggling a little. He snorted and covered his eyes, a blush forming as he shook his head.

"I'd have kissed back but I was just surprised."

"I know." She winked at him and pulled him with her, towards their friends, holding his hand tightly.

"Are you guys stalking us?" Mike asked, looking at them accusingly.

"Maybe-" Lucas shoved Dustin and rolled his eyes.

"El wanted to come to the park and watch the fireworks they're showing tonight." Will explained. "And I decided that since it's her birthday tomorrow, we'd all come with her."

"I didn't know you guys were coming! I'd have brought my guitar." Mike said cheekily.

"So, seeing as we caught you guys sucking face, are you official yet?" El joked. Mike bit his lip to keep from telling the truth and just looked down, feigning bashfulness and nodded.

"Yeah."

"You dog!" Dustin clapped him on the back and Mike glanced at Abigail, who gave him a look.

"She kissed me, dipshit." He muttered, shaking him off.

Tuesday, November 21, 2017

For El's birthday, they went to dinner at her favorite restaurant, went home and ate cake, everyone drank a little, except for Mike (of

course), and then gave her her presents. Will bought her a charm for her charm bracelet, which was shaped like a waffle, whereas he'd stated,

"I've been looking for a goddamn waffle charm for the last two years and I found it, happy birthday."

Lucas, Max and Dustin weren't sure what to get her so they chipped in and paid for her a spa day (that she and Max both would go to the Saturday after and *loved*) and Mike got her a new strap for her camera, that was black and had her name stitched on it in purple, which she loved and hugged him to death over.

7 PM

"Guys, I think Mike's dead." El told them, walking into the kitchen where the other four had been making dinner. Well, Will was making dinner and the other three were somewhat helping, more so just playing around like toddlers.

"Why's that?" Lucas asked.

"He's in bed."

"This early? Do you think he's sick?" Will asked. She shrugged.

"I poked him in the side and he just grunted, and usually he giggles like a little girl but..." She shrugged. "And isn't it weird that he hasn't packed at all today?"

"Packed for what?" Dustin asked, popping a fry in his mouth.

"To go back home for break." She rolled her eyes.

"Oh."

"I asked him what was wrong but he just buried his face in a pillow. He hasn't touched a thing that has to do with packing."

"I'll go see what's up." Max said, jogging up the stairs.

"Do you think Abigail broke up with him or something?" Will asked.

"Maybe that's why." El felt a spark of hope at that but immediately felt bad, because if that's the case, then it hurt Mike and she doesn't want him to hurt. She shrugged and felt her eyes sting.

"I don't know. I need to talk to you." She said quietly. He nodded and looked at Dustin and Lucas.

"Don't burn the kitchen down while we're gone." They stuck their tongues out at him but nodded, and he and El went outside.

"What's up?" He asked. She bit her lip and looked down, trying to fight back tears.

"I miss him." She whispered, attempting to keep her voice from cracking. It hardly worked.

"Oh El." He pulled her in for a hug and she hugged him back tightly. "I know you miss him."

"It's been three years." She whimpered.

"I know." He rubbed her back comfortingly.

"And I feel bad because I-I told him," She hiccuped, "before he d-died, that there would never be another." He just kept rubbing her back as she tried to calm herself. "And I-I...I like Mike. Like, I like him like him and I think I'm falling in love with him and I shouldn't. I can't do that to him." She started sobbing harder and he waited a couple minutes before he replied.

"Look, Ellie, I know it hurts." He whispered to her as he stroked her hair. "Bradley would want you to be happy, you know that. He was your first love, and he won't be your last."

"I loved him so *much* Will."

"I know you did. He'd want you to move on, I know it for a fact." He kissed her head. "If you need proof, I have it. He gave me a letter to give to you, stating the fact."

"What?" She pulled away, looking at him, her mascara and eyeliner smeared across under her eyes.

"He trusted me to give it to you, Ellie." He said softly. "Only me, he said. He told me to give it to you when you fell in love again and now is a good time as any. Come on." She hiccuped and nodded, wiping her nose.

During their talk outside, Max strutted into Mike's room and jumped onto his bed with him, lifting up his arm and wiggling until she was half underneath him.

"What's wrong?" She asked.

"Nothing." He turned his head so his face was back in the pillow.

"Hey, quit trying to suffocate yourself around me." She snatched the pillow out from under him and watched his face hit the mattress.

"Fuck *off* Max."

"Nope, not until you tell me what's wrong." She shook her head, even though he couldn't see her. "Did Abigail break up with you?" He snorted at that but shook his head.

"No, she didn't."

"Okay then, if that's not what it is and if you're not gonna *tell* me what's wrong, then why haven't you packed to go home?"

"What home?" He scoffed, lifting his head and looking at her, eyebrows furrowed. "I don't have a *home* to go back to."

"Excuse me? What do you mean?"

"Exactly what I said. I'm no longer welcome at *home* since I moved out."

"I'm gonna kill that mother fuck-"

"It wasn't him." He said, rolling over and sitting up. "It was my *mom.*" Her jaw dropped.

"Are you fucking serious?" She asked. He nodded.

"Yep. She *texted* me this morning and told me that I wasn't invited home for Thanksgiving or Christmas since I'm such an adult and can make my own choices."

"What the *actual fuck* Mike? What did you say?"

"I told her I didn't plan on it anyways." He shrugged.

"You say that like you don't care." She raised her eyebrows.

"Because I don't. Thanksgiving would end up in disaster, just like the last time I was home."

" So what are you gonna do? Just stay here for the rest of the week by yourself? You're gonna be by yourself on Thanksgiving?" He shrugged.

"I'm sure Abigail will come over at some point." He said, knowing she won't as she had a family who actually cared about her.

"Come to my house for Thanksgiving." Max said.

"You're not going to your house, you're going to Lucas'."

"So come to *Lucas'* house with me. You know they wouldn't mind."

"Not happening, Max." He shook his head. "They live right next to my parents house, and if they see that I'm over there they'll freak the hell out." Max sighed and stood up.

"You know what? Lemme grab my phone, I'm gonna go raise some hell." She said, marching out of his room. He scrambled to get off the bed and ran after her. By the time he reached the kitchen, she was about to tap the cal button but he snatched her phone out of her hand before she had a chance to.

"What the fuck, Mike?" She exclaimed. He held her phone out of reach.

"You're not going to call her, Max." He said, shaking his head. He looked up at the phone and deleted his mom's number from her phone.

"Give me my goddamn phone, Mike, I swear to God." She nearly yelled, glaring at him.

"Call who?" Dustin asked.

"His bitch of a mother, that's who!"

"Hey, whoa what the hell is going on in here?" Will asked, he and El walking in. Mike dropped Max's phone when he saw El, but Max caught it. He rushed over to her as Max unlocked her phone.

"You asshole! Why'd you delete the number?" She exclaimed, stomping her foot. He ignored her and went to El.

"What's wrong? What happened?" He asked. She sniffed.

"I'm okay." She said. He raised an eyebrow but she continued before he had a chance to say anything. "It's the anniversary of that thing I told you about."

"Oh. Um, can I hug you?" He asked quietly, glad that everyone else was arguing with Max. She nodded and held her arms out to him. He hugged her tightly and rubbed her back. She hugged him back tightly, burying her face in his chest. After a minute or two, they pulled away from each other but kept an arm around each other's waists.

"What the hell is going on?" Will asked him. "Max is too busy cursing your mom out to answer."

"She texted me and told me I wasn't invited back home basically ever." He shrugged. Will's jaw dropped, as did Dustin and Lucas', the same way Max's did. "So I'm staying here over break."

"No you're not." Lucas said. "You can come to my house."

"If they see me over there they'll freak the fuck out, you know that. And I don't want to bother you guys."

"I don't care."

"You can stay with us." El said, looking up at him.

"I couldn't-"

"You will, end of discussion. Now, I'm gonna go wash off my face since I look disgusting." She walked away and went upstairs. Mike watched her go and the other four were silent.

"Mom would love to have you over, Mike." Will said. "You're like a son to her, she's told me that a shit ton. And besides, I'm pretty sure Nancy and Steve are coming over for Thanksgiving too."

"It's already settled." He grumbled. "I can't say no to her."

"Whipped." Dustin coughed. Lucas punched his arm and Mike sucked in a deep breath, choosing to ignore him completely.

"I'm gonna go pack." He said, finally. He looked at Max. "I hope you're not mad at me too."

"I'm not mad at you. I just want to cuss the bitch out, and if I ever see her in public I will." He just shrugged and nodded, before following El upstairs.

5. Chapter Five

Notes for the Chapter:

> Thank you guys for the comments! I greatly appreciate them! Hope you are all staying safe out there!

When El walked out of the bathroom, she jumped at the sight of Mike sitting on his bed with a few piles of clothes next to a suitcase.

"Jesus Christ." She said, putting a hand over her heart. He chuckled.

"Sorry."

"Do you need help packing?" She asked, walking over and sitting on the bed, not giving him a chance to answer as she started folding a pair of boxers. He stared at her. "These are clean, right?" She asked. He nodded, biting his lip to keep from laughing.

"Thanks." He said, grabbing a shirt and folding it. They ended up side by side as they folded his clothes and put them in the suitcase. Neither said anything, they just sat in a comfortable silence until El said,

"When I was 18, the guy I loved died." She said quietly. He stopped in the middle of folding a pair of pants and looked at her. "It was three years ago today." She sighed, wringing her hands. "He had a brain tumor, and they couldn't get it out without killing him. He was in the hospital for three months before he died, and I would stay the night, go to school, and go back. I almost didn't graduate."

"Bradley Louis..." Mike said softly. "I remember him, he was my science partner in ninth and tenth grade. I didn't know you guys were together."

"Not many people did. We kept it quiet. We were gonna get married, have kids but... that obviously can't happen now. I told him I'd never love another man and it hurts that I'm starting to." She sighed, tilting her head back a bit, blinking a couple times to keep the tears from

falling.

"I think he'd want you to move on." Mike said after a few minutes.

"That's what Will said." She chuckled. "It's hard."

"I know it has to be. And I know that whoever you fall in love with, will be the luckiest man on earth, and Bradley would be happy to know it." She looked at him, silent tears rolling down her cheeks.

It's you.

She wanted to tell him so bad, but she couldn't. Not yet, especially because he has a girlfriend. She mentally scolded herself and wiped her eyes with her sleeves and sniffed.

"Thank you, Mike." She said, putting her head on his shoulder and her arms around his waist. He hugged her back and leaned back on his pillows, and she curled into his side. They fell asleep that way.

"Hey El? Here's the-" Will stopped short when he saw them curled up together and raised an eyebrow. He took a quick picture and moved the suitcase off the bed, folding the last few pieces of clothes and tossing them in it, before grabbing El's blanket off her bed and draping it over them. He put the letter on the table beside her bed and left, turning the light off and shutting the door lightly.

Wednesday, November 22, 2017

8 AM

The two didn't wake up until the next morning, still curled up together, but with a blanket over them. Mike woke up first and just watched El sleep for a few minutes and couldn't help but think.

Who is she falling for? Could it be- No, idiot, definitely not you. Why am I even thinking like this? This whole me and Abby relationship thing isn't doing anything for this jealousy *Dustin was going on about anyways, so I might as well just call it quits all together because it ain't benefiting anyone. I'll text her later or something.*

"Mm, Mike?" El mumbled, shifting slightly, opening her eyes and blinking sleepily. He smiled down at her.

"Morning, shorty, sleep well?" She nodded and yawned, and after a few seconds realized she was laying half on top of him. She sat up and turned to him with a sheepish grin.

"Sorry."

"It's okay." He chuckled. She smiled, then frowned.

"No it's not, you have a girlfriend. I shouldn't have even been on the same bed as you." She shot up and jumped on her bed. He sat up.

"Hey, no, no, we uh... We broke up." He said. She made a face.

"But you said you were still together yesterday. I heard Max tell Dustin that." Mike shook his head.

"It was a mutual thing, we're better off as friends." He explained.

"Oh. Are you okay?" She asked. He nodded.

"Yeah, I'm fine. It didn't really phase me much." She bit her lip and nodded. She looked to her right and saw the envelope with her name on it. She swallowed and picked it up.

"Um..." She coughed lightly. "Are you going to take a shower?" She asked.

"Nah, I'll take one after breakfast. You can go ahead." She smiled in thanks and went into the bathroom, shutting the door lightly. Mike got up and stretched, then headed down stairs, where Dustin was in the kitchen with Lucas making breakfast. Mike leaned against the counter and crossed his arms, watching Dustin flip a couple pieces of bacon over. Lucas raised an eyebrow at Mike but he ignored him. After a couple minutes, Dustin noticed Mike and grinned.

"Morning, Mike!" He said cheerfully.

"Abigail and I broke up." Mike replied.

"What? Why?" Dustin nearly yelled.

"You seem an awful lot more upset over it than me." Mike raised an eyebrow and titled his head to the side. Dustin coughed into his fist and said,

"Oh, uh, no. I just... I thought you two were good together. Why'd you break up?" He asked, glancing at Lucas who just shook his head.

"Well, for starters, she has a girlfriend." Mike stated and Dustin's eyes nearly bugged out of his head.

"I-What-How did you know?" He exclaimed. "Did she tell you?

"You have a *very* loud mouth." Mike said, shaking his head. "I heard you telling Max about it in the basement." He said. "I was going to get El and I some drinks and I heard you."

"But, but you two kissed!" Will walked in then.

"Who kissed?" He asked.

"Mike and Abigail." Dustin replied.

"Yep, that was the same day I talked to her about the little plan."

"What plan?" Will asked, confused. Mike looked at Dustin who looked down guiltily and told Will about his plan. Will smacked Mike.

"What did I do?"

"You went along with it!"

"What? No I didn't."

"Yeah, you did, seeing as you faked being together to make El jealous. What would you do if she found out? She's already having a hard enough time with falling for you and not thinking you like her back *because* of Abigail."

"I didn't know about it until a month after we started *dating* ." Mike scowled. "And even if she found out, it's not like it would- Wait, *what*

?"

"Yeah, she's falling in love with you." Will glared at him. "She made a promise to Bradley that she'd never fall in love with another man-"

"Yeah... She told me that last night."

"Okay, so you understand that her falling for you is a *hard thing for her to do* . She'd be hurt that you lied above all."

"It wasn't about making her jealous to begin with, not on my end, at least." He glared at Dustin. "I honestly thought Abigail was pretty, and she is, so I was like maybe I'll go out with her, try dating someone else and get over this crush I have on El, because having a fucking crush for to years to someone you've never talked to is ridiculous, and there was no chance she'd like me back so..." He shrugged. "I'd never want to hurt El. And it's not like I'm gonna ask her out or anything now anyways. I know she's having a hard time and it's all up to her, whenever she's ready. I'm pretty sure I love her too, so the feelings are mutual."

"Mike-"

"I'm done talking to you for now, Dustin." Mike said, turning his attention back to Will. "And if you want to punch me for sounding like an ass or anything, feel free to do so. I'd never hurt El. I know I probably sound like the biggest douche bag for using another girl to get over her but I didn't want it to be that way."

"I understand, Mike." Will told him. "I agree on the douchebag thing, just a *tad* bit, but I know what you meant, and I know you wouldn't hurt her. And if you do, I'll beat your ass." He gave him a look and Mike chuckled. "Not to mention what Hop would do." Mike's eyes widened and Will laughed. "Just give her time, Mike, she'll come around, I know it."

What they didn't know, was that El had needed to get something from the laundry room and heard the last bit of the conversation, *not* hearing the part about using Abigail to make her jealous, and was internally freaking out a bit.

He loves me?!

El had absolutely no idea how to act after finding out Mike loved her. She ran back to the bathroom without getting what she needed, shut the door and slid down it until she was sitting on the floor. For a minute or two, she sat there staring at the letter she just read, and grabbed it, rereading it.

My love,

If you're reading this, that means you're falling in love again. Promise me that you WILL love again, Ellie, because I promise you I won't be angry. I want you to be happy, whether it's with me or another man. I promise I'll love you no matter what, even if you love another. You deserve the world, you deserve a man that'll take care of you for years to come. I hope you find him. There's another letter in the envelope, that I want you to give the man you plan to marry. I have a couple rules and guidelines for him, because he'll need it with you, and I mean that in the MOST endearing way possible. Always be yourself, El, never change for ANYONE, and I mean it. That's all, I think. Well, not all, there's too many words for me to say to show you how much I love you, and that I'll always love you. Like I said earlier, I want you to be happy no matter what, okay? I know you can't tell me to my face, but promise me you'll love again. I don't want you to ever be alone.

I love you so much, El. Always remember that

Love, Bradley

She didn't realize she'd been crying again until she saw a few tears hit the paper. She sniffed and wiped her eyes, hugging it to her chest and looking up at the ceiling. She felt a smile creeping up on her face, and she could feel her heartbeat in her chest, a tingling in her belly. She knew what these feelings were...love. Feelings she felt for Bradley, feelings she'll always have for him but... Now, she had new feelings, and these were for Mike, and she promised herself, and Bradley, and even Mike, that she would tell him soon.

"I promise."

It was after one o'clock when everyone finally left. Dustin and Will were taking Will's car, Mike is letting Lucas and Max take his truck, and he's riding with El. She hadn't exactly said much since this morning, but he figured it was because of Bradley, so he didn't let it bother him. On the ride back, he texted Abby and told her what had happened this morning, and told him that if he ever needed anything to let her or Adriana know, and he was thankful, later on down the road, when he really did need Adriana's help, but not for a reason you expect. Adriana's a lawyer, a couple years older than Abby, and a very good one, at that, and has connections that Mike'll need in the near future.

Meanwhile, El's mind was exploding with so many thoughts and feelings, forcing herself to keep quiet or she would tell Mike the truth, and she did NOT want to do that while they were on the road. She'd decided that she was going to wait until they got back to Chicago after break, knowing he would have a hard time this week after the whole thing with his mom. The silence broke about an hour into the drive when a particularly loud burp came from El, and she slapped a hand over her mouth. She blinked and after a second, glanced at Mike, who was staring at her, eyes wide. After another second or two, he snorted and burst into laughter. It took her a minute to join him, and when she did, she felt the happiest she's been in weeks.

They did eventually go back to silence, other than the music Mike played. He occasionally asked her what song she wanted to listen to and he'd play it. About ten minutes away from Hawkins, his phone rang. El reached over and turned the radio down as he answered, it was Holly.

"Hey Hols!" He said happily.

"Where are you going to stay?" She asked immediately. He furrowed his eyebrows.

"I'm staying with Will and his family, they offered so... Why?"

"Will I get to see you or Nancy at all?"

"Of course! I wouldn't come to Hawkins and not see you, Holly." She didn't say anything for a minute, and he heard her sniff. "What's wrong?"

"I just... mom isn't cooking Thursday." She said. "And... and you and Nancy won't be home like usual. I don't want to be alone." If it was possible, Mike's heart would have dropped to his stomach at her words. He swallowed.

"You won't be alone, Holly, I promise. We'll be in Hawkins in ten minutes and I'll come pick you up, okay? If I need to, we'll go and get a hotel room and we'll stay there so you won't be at home, okay?"

"Okay." She sniffed again.

"You don't have to do that, Mike." El told him. "Both of you can stay with us, we have plenty of room."

"Would Mrs. Byers mind?"

"Not at all." He nodded.

"Okay, Holly?"

"Yeah?"

"We're gonna stay at Will's house until I leave, are you okay with that?"

"Yeah. What about mom and dad though?"

"If they have a problem with it, I'll deal with them, okay? You should go pack you a bag. Do you want me to stay on the phone with you until we get there or?"

"No, I'll be okay. Text me when you get here, though."

"I will. I love you."

"I love you too." She hung up. Mike just let his phone fall in his lap. He ran a hand through his hair and let out a long sigh.

"I swear, the second I finish college I'm taking those fuckers to court and I'll raise her myself." He grumbled. "And that's a goddamn promise." He tapped his fingers on his knees. El didn't know what to say, so instead of saying anything, she reached over and took his hand in hers and intertwined their fingers together. Eventually, she said,

"I know you will. And she'll be happy with you, I know it."

Mike didn't even have to text Holly, she was already outside, waiting for them to arrive. The second Mike stepped out of the car, she was in his arms, hugging him tightly. He hugged her back and leaned down, kissing her on the top of her head.

"I know you haven't been gone long but I missed you." She mumbled into his shirt.

"I missed you too, Hols. But hey, we get almost an entire month together next month!" He said, pulling away and smiling at her.

"Why do you have to go back next week?" She whined.

"We have midterms." He told her. "Just like you. Come on, let's go. We don't want to keep El waiting, right?"

"Right." She muttered. She got in the back seat and he put her bag next to her and got back in the passenger seat.

"Hi Holly!" El said, smiling back at her.

"Hey El." She smiled back. "I haven't seen you in forever."

"I know, it's been a while, huh? You've gotten taller." She gave her a look. Holly nodded.

"Mhm. Last time I got a check up my doctor said I'd be taller than Nancy. I'll be closer to Mike's height." Mike chuckled. El smiled and started to drive.

"She did say that, didn't she?"

"Yep! I just hope I'm not taller than any guys I date." Mike coughed and El giggled at the face he made.

"Whoa there, don't you worry about no boys yet. You're not allowed to date until you're thirty."

"But that's so *old* !"

"Hey, you dont wanna catch cooties, do you?" El asked, wiggling her eyebrows.

"Oh, ew! No, never mind." She shivered. Mike looked at her and mouthed *thank you* . She just grinned back at him. "Dad makes me wash dishes and clean up the house because mom doesn't anymore." The smile on his face dropped and he tensed up. "He said a lot of bad words about her but then he told me that it was to practice for when I get married. He said I had to be a loyal housewife."

"Don't listen to him, Holly." Mike said, balling up his fists. "You should know how to do those things, yes, but it's not what you're going to do when you get married. You do what *you* want to do, and not what anyone else says."

"I could be a farmer if I wanted to?" She asked, eyes wide. El giggled a little and he relaxed a little.

"If you wanna be a farmer, you can be a farmer."

"Why do you want to be a farmer, Holly?" El asked.

"Because there are horses on a farm." She explained. "And chickens, goats, pigs, bunny's, sheep and a lot of other animals and I love animals." Mike couldn't help but smile at her enthusiasm.

"It sounds like it! I like animals too. When I'm a little older and have my own place, I want to get a cat or a dog." El told her.

"Can I name it?" She asked. El grinned and nodded.

"Of course you can."

Mike's mood improved a little by the time they reached the Byers/ Hopper house. Will had already dropped Dustin off and arrived before them and Hopper and Joyce were outside waiting for El on the porch. He couldn't help but envy her, having two parents that actually cared about her. Don't get him wrong, he was happy for her, but he wanted it too. He let them have their moment and got out, opening Holly's door for her and taking her bag and throwing it over his shoulder. He shut the door back and held a fist out to her. She giggled and fist bumped him.

"Mike!" Joyce exclaimed, hardly giving him a chance to turn around before she was hugging him. He froze for a second, not expecting it, but hugged her back with a smile.

"Hey, Mrs. Byers." She patted his back.

"How many times do I have to tell you to call me Joyce?" She said, looking up at him.

"Infinite." He replied with a grin. She rolled her eyes fondly and let him go. She hugged Holly for a couple seconds.

"I'm excited to have you here, Holly." She said warmly. "Both of you, as well as Nancy and Steve, right?"

"Uh, I think so. I haven't talked to Nancy recently." He said, running a hand through his hair. She raised an eyebrow at him. He made a face. "What? Do I have something on my face?"

"No, you need a haircut." She replied, reaching up and ruffling his hair. He chuckled.

"He won't do it, mom." El said, walking over to them with Hopper in tow. "A couple weeks after I moved in I told him he needed to cut it but he won't."

"I like his hair." Holly said, reaching up and jumping, attempting to touch his hair. He rolled his eyes but crouched for a second to let her mess with it.

"I like it too, but I don't know how he deals with it. It looks so thick." She said.

"It is thick." Mike replied.

"Feel!" Holly grabbed El's hand and tugged her forward, almost knocking her down on top of Mike but he caught her by the waist and then immediately retracted his hands in embarrassment. He didn't see the look between Joyce and Hopper. He felt El's hands in his hair and then her small gasp.

"Oh my God, it's so soft!" She said, lightly touching it. He snorted.

"Okay, when did Mike turn into a dog?" Will asked, walking outside.

"Have you ever felt his hair before?" El asked. She was in literal awe at it and Mike could hardly keep a straight face. She didn't let Will reply and said, "Come touch it!"

"That's what she said." Hopper coughed and Mike snorted.

"I'd rather not feel up my best friends hair, thank you very much." Mike rolled his eyes and stood up. His knees cracked and El cringed.

"Ew, never do that again."

"Can't promise that." He shrugged. He turned to Hop and bit his lip, holding a hand out.

"Hey, Chief." Hopper shook his hand but pulled him in for a quick hug. It happened so quickly Mike hardly processed it.

"Call me Hop." He told him. Mike nodded. "Don't be scared of me, kid, you haven't done anything...yet." He gave him a look and Mike swallowed, giving him a nervous smile.

"Okay so, I'm making you guys a late lunch." Joyce stated, clapping her hands. "And I got Jonathan's room ready for you, Mike, since he won't be coming home this week."

"Oh, he's not?" Mike asked, confused. She shook her head.

"He wants to, but he's snowed in." She explained. "No planes are coming in or leaving until next week. He's gonna try and come visit for a weekend I think, or probably just wait until Christmas and come

home for two weeks." She babbled. He chuckled and nodded, following her into the house with he, El, *and* Holly's bags in tow. He put El's by the couch, as he didn't know where to put them, and went with Joyce to Jonathan's room. "I pulled the air mattress out but I haven't blown it up yet, I figured you'd rather wait until later so it wouldn't be in the way. And you two can fight it out over who gets which." She gave him a look and he snorted.

"Me and Hols don't argue as much as me and Nancy, right Hols?" He asked, booping her nose. She crossed her eyes but grinned and nodded.

"I can sleep on the air mattress because I know your legs are way too long." She said, shrugging. "Like a baby giraffe. Wait, no, you're like that spider with really long legs." Mike's mouth dropped open.

"Daddy Long Legs?" Joyce offered, attempting to keep from laughing.

"Yeah, that! Especially when you wear black pants." She grinned at him. He pouted.

"You people are so mean to me." He whined and crossed his arms over his chest and went back in the living room, where El and Will were sitting on either end of the couch. He plopped between them, still pouting.

"Awe, is the poor wittle baby upset?" El asked, poking his cheek. He glared at her playfully and mumbled something. "I'm sorry, what was that?"

"Holly said I look like a Daddy Long Legs when I wear black pants." He grumbled. "What's so bad about long legs? I mean, Hop has long legs too, he's taller than me."

"You've got more leg than I do, kid." Hopper said, reclining back in his chair.

"Your legs are twice as long as mine, dude." El said, bringing her knees up to her chest and looking at him.

"Just when I thought I had a sweet sister, she had to turn on me." He sighed dramatically.

"So dramatic." El rolled her eyes.

"That's nothing knew." Will told her. "You should see him when he's fussing at Dustin as if he's his child."

"Like when I had to act like his mom when he was playing the drums at like four in the morning when he was drunk and I first moved in?" He snorted and nodded.

"Speaking of you moving in, how does that work?" Hopper asked him. "Like the bills and all?"

"My grandparents pay for everything." Mike explained. "I've tried to get them to let me pay but they're hard headed. Runs in the family." He muttered the last part. "Everyone just has to pay a hundred a month, for WiFi, since they outright refuse to pay for that, and groceries."

"Five hundred a month for groceries?" Hopper questioned.

"Eh, about seven hundred, actually. I add two hundred to it." Hopper raised an eyebrow.

"I didn't think you had a job?"

"I wouldn't really call it a job, job. I just... I write short stories and Kali, actually, edits them and I get paid for it."

"Oh my God, they're so good!" El exclaimed, clapping her hands excitedly. "He let me read one a couple weeks ago and I cried." Hopper raised another eyebrow. "Like, it was based off the song I'll Walk and it was just amazing. I've read a couple more. I keep telling him he should try writing an entire novel but he won't do it." Mike blushed at the praise.

"I told you I might one day." He mumbled, all bashful.

"I figured you'd do something like that, stories or screenwriting." Joyce said. "Because of how you wrote those campaigns." He shrugged.

"That'd be cool." He said, "But I'm not *that* great."

"Psh." Will scoffed and pushed at Mike's head. Mike reciprocated the action and stuck his tongue out.

"I'm starting to think that Holly's the most mature one here." El said, rolling her eyes. Holly grinned.

"What about me?" Hopper asked.

"What about you? You're in no way, shape or form mature half the time." He stuck his tongue out at her. "See? You're only proving my point."

6. Chapter Six

Summary for the Chapter:

Explanation in the notes!

Notes for the Chapter:

Those who have enjoyed this story from the original to now, have probably noticed that two chapters have been removed.

Well, I thought about it quite a bit, and ultimately decided that I would redo the last chapter the smallest amount, and the rest of this story. Richie, and that whole storyline, will no longer be in this story. It's not because I've all of a sudden decided I didn't like Richie (I love him and will forever he's iconiC), I just feel like most of my stories have ended up as crossovers in a way and I don't really plan on starting any new ones. Perhaps I'll write a whole new story one day, similar to how the original Wheeler/ Tozier family went.

This is going to be a story strictly about the characters from Stranger Things, no extra fandoms! I'm sorry if I disappointed anyone, but those of you who read my other Richie story, I'll hopefully be posting something soon!

And the storyline with Mike and his ex will be different, because I lost all notes that were involved in that (due to getting a new computer and not saving that particular document on google drive because i'm a dumbass).

Also, I'm sorry for not updating in so long. Life has just been insane and no fun and stressful and I just haven't had any motivation for writing. But I'm slowly coming back so hopefully I won't be gone so

long again!

Thursday, November 23, 2017

It's safe to say that for Mike, so far, it has been the worst Thanksgiving he's ever had. Not to say he didn't enjoy a lot of it, but there was one particular thing that made it worse.

See, everything was going *great* . Steve and Nancy arrived early this morning and Nancy hugged her siblings like her life depended on it. Joyce had made an amazing brunch for them all, and everyone helped out in the kitchen with dinner. Well, everyone except for Holly and El, who sat in the living room watching TV and giggling together, which had made Mike smile and Nancy question him.

Dinner was going okay, everyone had been talking and laughing, and asking Mike, El and Will about college and how they were doing. Hopper constantly made dad jokes that made El groan, and Nancy kept poking Mike in the side, whereas he, in return, would tickle her sides. Declaring that she was hot, Holly rolled up her sleeves to try and cool herself off, and Mike's entire body stiffened when he saw her forearms.

"Holly." she looked at him and then looked where he was looking. She looked back at him. Neither said anything, but their silence brought attention to them.

"What's wrong?" Joyce asked.

"What happened, Holly?" Mike asked, quietly. She bit her lip and didn't say anything. Tears formed in her eyes.

"What is it, Mike?" Nancy asked.

"Bruises." he said, glancing at her. He grabbed Holly's hand and brought her arm up onto the table. Said bruises were shaped like fingerprints, as if someone had grabbed her there, *hard.* They were big, too, way too big to be another kid.

"Dad didn't mean too, Mikey." Holly told him. "He's never hit me before. He just grabbed me a little too hard is all, I promise. It's okay."

"Holly, that's not okay." Mike shook his head.

"He shouldn't be grabbing you like that at all, kid." Hopper said. She shrugged. Mike sighed and ran a hand over his face.

"Sweetie, can I talk to you?" Joyce asked Holly, who nodded. She looked at El and Nancy and nodded towards the living room. The two stood up and followed Joyce and Holly. Mike sat back in his chair and stared at the table for a couple seconds, and then stood up.

"Mike, where are you going?" Will asked, making a move to get up.

"Outside." he mumbled and walked out.

"He's going to smoke, isn't he?" Steve asked, with a sigh. Will nodded.

"Yep."

"He smokes?" Hopper asked, eyebrows raised. "He doesn't seem like someone who would." Will shrugged.

"I mean, he doesn't do it often. He quit for a couple months but a couple days after he and Dustin came back after break in September he started up again. It's mainly just when he's stressed or upset, and I'm pretty sure he's both right now." he told him.

"Yeah, I haven't seen him smoke much but when they were in high school he'd almost smoke a pack a day." Steve said. "Just imagine how much money he could have saved if he didn't smoke." Hopper rolled his eyes.

"Well, I'm gonna go join him, have a chat with him." Will nodded and Hopper stood, grabbing his coat, and Mike's, seeing as he'd forgotten his. He felt his pocket for his own cigarettes and walked outside. Mike was sitting on the porch, knees up to his chest, blowing smoke rings with his arms wrapped around himself. "You forgot this, kid." Mike flinched a little at the sound of his voice but looked up at him and gave him a small smile, putting the cigarette between his teeth and pulling on the coat.

"Thanks." he muttered. He nodded to him and sat next to him, lighting his own cigarette. "I didn't know you smoked?"

"I could say the same for you." Mike titled his head a little and nodded, taking a puff. "I've been trying to quit, though, and I'm doing pretty well. This is the first one today."

"Same. But that's good. I don't smoke much, just when I'm stressed or something." Mike shrugged.

"Why did you start smoking to begin with, if you don't mind me asking?" Mike didn't say anything for a couple seconds.

"My dad is an alcoholic." he said, finally. "And I drank once, when I was sixteen, and I've never touched it again. Trust me, I've wanted to, because it made me forget everything that stressed me out. AKA my shit father." he rolled his eyes, taking another puff of his cigarette. "I don't want to end up like him, because it's hereditary, you know? Alcoholism I mean. Max stole a couple cigarettes from her brother for us to try and I was the only one who actually stuck with it. Everyone else didn't even finish half of one and the first night I smoked, I smoked like five. It made me not want to drink." he shrugged again and looked at Hopper. "Why'd *you* start smoking?"

"Peer pressure, believe it or not." He replied, flicking the ashes off his. "I was younger than you, though. I started at about thirteen." Mike raised an eyebrow. "I know, that was young, but everyone was doing it. I remember being seventeen and sharing cigarettes with Joyce under the bleachers, getting caught but continuing to do them. They just became a bad habit. I smoked and drank a lot when my daughter died, though."

"What?" Mike asked, confused.

"I had a little girl, Sarah. She got sick when she was younger and passed. My drinking split me and my ex-wife up. I'm assuming El didn't tell you about that?" Mike shook his head. "El's the reason I quit drinking altogether. When she came into my life, I quit cold turkey."

"I'm sorry." Hopper just nodded and didn't say anything for a while.

"I know you're pissed at your dad right now for what he's done, and so am I, kid, and I'm gonna keep an eye out for her while you're

gone." Mike looked at him and put his cigarette out.

"It took literally everything I had not to get in my truck and go over there and beat his ass."

"I know. I don't blame you for wanting to, but you've gotta understand that if the police get involved you'd be arrested for assault, never mind what he did to Holly. They'd overlook that."

"Fuck the police. No offence." Hopper snorted.

"In any other circumstance I would be. I know you want custody of her, you or Nancy. El told me." he explained, seeing the confused look on Mike's face. "I'm gonna be honest, I'd rather Nancy get custody of her." Mike raised an eyebrow at him. "I only say this because raising a kid is a lot of work, and you're still in school, it'd be even more stressful on yourself, trust me, I know. I can get you a court date and evidence if I need to, but I'm gonna need you to *not* worry about that, okay kid? I know it's all sudden and you can't help *but* worry, but you've got midterms that you have to pass next week and you don't need anymore added stress to it." Mike sighed.

"I know. But... Nancy getting custody of her means she would take her to New York with them." he said. Hopper bit his lip.

"Actually, a little birdie told me that they were thinking about moving back here. Maybe not to Hawkins specifically but... close."

"Who?"

"Steve." Mike snorted.

"Figures." he looked ahead of him. "I know Holly would be better off with Nancy, it's just hard." he rubbed his face with his hands and let out a groan. "God, I feel like I'm in a damn Lifetime movie or something, thinking about all this shit so quick." Hopper laughed at that.

"It kinda does, actually. I'm gonna head back in, I just wanted to talk to you. If you ever need anything, kid, just let me know, okay?" Mike nodded.

"Thanks, Hop." Hopper stood up.

"And don't think I don't see the way you look at my daughter. You'd better tell her soon." Mike blushed.

"Oh my God." he buried his face in his hands as Hopper laughed.

"Jeez, dad, what are you doing to embarrass him?" El asked, walking outside. Hopper just snorted and shrugged, walking back inside. El rolled her eyes and wrapped her blanket around her tighter and sat beside Mike. "You okay?" she asked. He looked at her and nodded.

"Yeah, we talked some. Your dad's cool. I said fuck the police and he wasn't offended by it." she giggled at that.

"I've said that multiple times so he shouldn't be by now." they sat in silence for a while, and she said, "I, uh, I'm sorry about the deal with Holly. I never expected it." Mike sighed.

"I should've." he said quietly. She made a face. "He's grabbed me like that before, when I was younger. And he meant it, meaning he meant it with her too."

"Why didn't your mom do anything?" she asked, surprised.

"She doesn't care." he shrugged. "She never really has. She's a whore." her eyes widened at that and her mouth dropped open. "Yeah, she makes it seem like our family is perfect, when in reality she's off fucking some other guy when dads at work."

“I… I don’t know what to say.”

“I’m sorry for putting all that on you, I want to punch something and talking somewhat helps." she grabbed one of his hands, which had been fidgeting with a loose thread on his jeans, and squeezed lightly. She put her head on his shoulder.

"I'd say punch me but I'm a girl and if you ever hit me I'd rip your dick off and feed it to you." she deadpanned. He snorted so hard he coughed. She giggled.

"Christ." he chuckled and shook his head.

"I'm sorry about all this, though, Mike." she said seriously. "You don't deserve parents like them. None of you do. *They* don't deserve you. They'll regret it one day, I can assure you that." he looked down at her. She looked back up at him, glancing at his lips.

"Thanks..." he whispered.

"For?" she asked softly.

"For being so amazing." he replied. He licked his lips. She looked at him for a second.

"You know what? Fuck it." she reached up and put her hands on his cheeks, pulling him down and pressing her lips to his. To say he was shocked was an understatement, but he couldn't help but smile as he kissed her back.

Well, for Mike, it turned out to be the *best* Thanksgiving he's ever had.

Of course, not counting his mentally and physically abusive father grabbing his little sister by the arm, but that would be taken care of, and he'd make sure none of them had to see him again.

"It's about time!" Will exclaimed and Mike and El jumped apart, Mike literally falling off the porch. "Oh shit." he burst out laughing.

"Mike!" El exclaimed. Mike just buried his face in his arms. "You asshat!" she flipped Will off, who laughed as he walked back inside. She heard a faint,

“They were *totally* making out out there.”

"This is fine." Mike said, muffled by his jacket sleeves. She laughed and grabbed his shoulder, attempting to pull him onto his back.

"Jesus, you're heavy for a noodle, Noodle." she grunted. "He went back inside, come on." he finally rolled over and she sat up on her knees, putting her hands on her hips. "Considering the way you fell off the porch, I'd say that that wasn't a very good kiss, although I know you were smiling." he blushed but gave her a grin.

"No, that was a great kiss, but uh, I fell in the snow and er, look like I peed my pants so..." she looked down at his crotch and started giggling. He sat up on his elbows and looked at her.

"This is probably the best first kiss story ever, actually." she said, still giggling. He raised an eyebrow.

Holy shit, holy shit, holy shit. What the fuck I can NOT believe that just happened. And she said first kiss. First kiss. Does that mean we're gonna kiss more? Oh my GOD she's kissing me again.

"Okay lovebirds, let's come back in and finish eating before everything gets cold!" Steve yelled. They broke apart again and rolled their eyes.

"We'll talk later." she told him. He nodded and she stood up, holding a hand out to him. He took it and let her pull him up. They walked in, hand in hand, blushes on their face. Mike did let go though, and knelt down to hug Holly.

"We're gonna get you out of there, okay, Hols? Dad won't bother you anymore, at all. I promise." she smiled and hugged his neck.

"I know. You're the best, Mikey." she grinned at him and he grinned back, deciding not to ask about the redness in her eyes. Nancy had them as well so he figured they had a good talk too. He stood up and Will coughed.

"Did my sister kissing you scare you so bad you wet yourself?" he asked, an eyebrow raised. Mike rolled his eyes.

"No, you did."

"So you did pee on yourself?" Nancy asked, on the verge of laughter.

"You're twenty, Mikey, you shouldn't be peeing on yourself anymore." Holly told him, pointing a finger at him. Mike's jaw dropped and he looked down, having forgotten about that. El slapped a hand over her mouth at the look on his face. They all started laughing.

"No!" he exclaimed, whining a little. "I fell off the porch and into the snow." he grumbled, walking towards Jonathan's room to change

pants. He heard them laughing the whole way there. They'd stopped by the time he came back but he was still pouting, his cheeks red.

"You people are so rude." he plopped down in his seat.

"At least you didn't fall on your butt in the mud?" Joyce offered. "That happened to El over the summer-"

"No embarrassing stories, please and thank you, I embarrass myself enough as it is in front of him." El said, sticking her tongue out at her. Mike couldn't help but smile at her. She smiled back, her cheeks turning pink. Will smirked.

"I've said it once before, I'll say it again. I ship it."

(Mike & El)

(11:31 PM) El- Mike get off your phone and sleep

(11:32) Noodle- how'd you know I'm awake?

(11:33) El- facebook said you were, duh

(11:33) El- uh do you wanna talk?

(11:34) Noodle- texting or?

(11:35) El- no you can come to my room. the rooms are sound proof so no one can eavsdrop

(11:35) El- AKA Will and my dad

(11:36) Noodle- lmao omw

About a minute or so later, there was a soft knock on the door frame of El's room. She looked up from her spot on a giant bean bag and smiled at him, nodding for him to come in. He shut the door behind him. She stood up and plopped on her bed, patting the space in front of her. He scratched the back of his neck and sat Indian style in front

of her.

"I'm, uh, this is probably gonna be the most awkward time you'll ever see me." she chuckled.

"Same." they stared at each other. "So, uh..."

"Um, okay, first off, I want to be completely honest." he told her. She raised an eyebrow. "You'll probably think I'm incredibly lame for this but uh, I've had a crush on you for the last two years." she tilted her head to the side.

"Really?"

"Yeah. Uh, I was too much of a wimp to go up and talk to you when I saw you at work. Er, I didn't know your name either so I was kinda internally flipping out when I found out it was you who was my roommate. Not like a bad flip out, but..." he shrugged.

"That's so cute." she said, grinning at him. He gave her a nervous smile. "I don't think it's lame at all. I didn't see you much, but I always thought you were cute."

"Oh, uh, good, good. Thanks." he blushed. "God, that wasn't even the worst part." he muttered. She made a face. "So, you're probably gonna think I'm a total dick when I tell you this but me and Abigail weren't really...together?" he made a face. "Let me start from the beginning, jeez." he rolled his eyes at himself. "I honestly thought that Abigail was pretty and that I could maybe get over you with her, and I know that sounds bad but I wasn't doing it to hurt anyone, but myself really. So when I got her number I was like cool, this is cool. We went on a couple dates and all and I liked her, but not like that, you know?" she nodded. "Well, remember a couple weeks ago when I asked if I did something to make you mad?" she nodded again. "Well... when I went to get us drinks I heard Dustin telling Max about some...plan he had, that involved Abigail. She's bi, and has had a girlfriend for three years. That girl that we thought she was just friends with that day at Benny's was her."

"What the fuck?" El exclaimed. "Was that plan to hurt you?"

"No, at least, he didn't intend for it to. He wanted to... make you jealous because I was with another girl. I promise you, El, that I didn't know about it until that day I heard him talking to Max and Lucas. And the only reason I kept up with it was to see how long he'd actually go along with it too. She knew about it. The day before your birthday, when me and her kissed, I talked to her about it and we both agreed to just pretend in front of you guys. That's why she kissed me, she saw you guys.I know you'll probably hate me and all but I wasn't trying to hurt anyone and I'm still pissed at Dustin for doing it because it was wrong and I never wanted to make you jealous in the first place because I didn't think there was no way in hell you'd ever like me back and-" he broke off when El giggled. He took a deep breath and squeezed his eyes shut. He felt her moving around on the bed and figured she was about to get ready to kick him out, but then he felt her lips on his and he relaxed a little, kissing her back. She pulled away and he opened his eyes, seeing a soft smile on her face.

"I don't hate you, Mike." she told him. "I'm not mad at you, either. I'd probably have done the same thing. Dustin is a dick but I do understand that he was just trying to help you, but he shouldn't have done it that way." Mike nodded in agreement. "Also, you need to work on your breathing when you babble like that." he blushed and looked down. "Uh uh, look at me." she put her finger on his chin and made him look at her. "Rest assured I plan to slap Dustin next time I see him, but I'm gonna be honest now, too. His plan worked." Mike eyebrows furrowed. "I was jealous as all hell. That's kinda why I distanced myself from you, I didn't wanna come off as a bitch and I didn't want Abigail to think anything was going on between us. And..." she blushed this time. "I uh, I heard you talking to everyone the other day." She said.

"Wait... when I confronted Dustin?" he asked, having forgotten about the other part of the conversation.

"Oh you confronted him?" she asked, tilting her head to the side. He nodded. "Oh. Well, no. I heard the end of it." she bit her lip. He furrowed his eyebrows, trying to remember. Then it dawned on him. He buried his face in his hands and let out a groan.

"Oh my God this is so embarrassing. I didn't want you to find out like

that." he whined. She chuckled.

"I didn't want you to find out through Will either so I get where you're coming from." she grabbed his hands and made him look at her again, but held his hands in hers on her lap. "I am falling, though, Mike. Faster than I thought possible. With Bradley, I didn't know or think I loved him until a year after we started dating, and me and you aren't even dating. Well..." she bit her lip. "Uh, anyways, I'm a mess, Mike, and I need you to understand that. I'm pretty sure I'm in love with you too, and I don't know where we're going from here, but I want you to know that." he didn't say anything for a couple seconds, he just gently rubbed his thumbs over her knuckles.

"You know that I love you." he told her. "And I understand. You're a beautiful mess though, but I'm a mess too." she gave him a smile. "Where do you want to go from here?"

"Well, I... I know it's kind of sudden, but maybe... maybe be my boyfriend?" she asked nervously, biting her lip. She never thought she'd see a grin on his face as big as the one he had.

"Definitely." he said, "We're not doing anything tomorrow, right?" he asked. She shook her head.

"Nope." she said, popping the P. "I mean there might be some stuff like in the morning but that's it."

"Okay, well, um, do you wanna go on a date?" he asked, letting one of her hands go and scratching the back of his neck awkwardly. She snorted, covering her mouth and nose with her hand.

"You're so cute, Mike. So awkward asking me out when we're already boyfriend and girlfriend." she snickered and he blushed, smiling. "But yes, I would love to go on a date tomorrow."

Friday, November 24, 2017

9 AM

"Has anyone seen Mike?" Holly asked, walking in the kitchen, rubbing the sleep out of her eyes. Everyone shook their heads.

"Come to mention it, I haven't seen El either." Hopper said. "And she's usually up before everyone."

"I'll go check her room, they might be in there." Will said. They nodded and he made his way to her room. The door was cracked open slightly so he opened it a little more and peered inside, but no one was in there. There was a folded piece of paper on the bed though, so he continued in to be a nosy little shit. He picked it up and saw that on the front it said;

To whoever finds it first, open and read to your hearts content <3

He raised an eyebrow and went back in the kitchen, waving it in the air.

"I think they ran off to elope or something." he said, plopping in a seat at the table.

"What's elope?" Holly asked.

"It's a version of a wedding, kinda." Joyce told her.

"Oh. Really?" she asked hopefully, looking at Will, who chuckled and shook his head.

"I was only joking, Hols."

"Awe, I want them to get married." she pouted.

"Maybe one day," he said. He opened the note and read aloud, "Mike and I have decided to run away together and get waffles. We're going on an adventure and don't know when we'll be back, but probably by lunch. P.S. AKA a date! Don't tell anyone Will!" he laughed after reading it, and Hopper and Joyce snorted at her choice of words. "I hope she means not to tell Max, Lucas and Dustin."

"Probably, you know how Max'll react." Joyce chuckled.

"Yeah, she's gonna freak. She's been wanting them to get together since she first moved in."

Meanwhile, Mike and El were sitting across from each other at the Waffle House, sharing a plate of waffles.

"What's something I don't know about you?" Mike asked.

"Hm... I have curly hair." she said. He raised an eyebrow.

"You do?"

"Yep!"

"I've never seen you with your hair down. Why do you always wear it up?" she made a face.

"You haven't, have you? Hm..." she reached up and pulled the hair tie out, letting it fall over her shoulders. "It's uh, it's pretty long and I kind of hate it, but I don't trust anyone to cut my hair. The last time I really let someone *cut* it, they shaved it all off." his eyes widened and she nodded. "Long story, but yeah, I had a legit buzz cut. I went and got it trimmed at the beginning of summer but the girl who did it fucked it up so it's all messed up back there." she ran her hands through it and it fell a little above her mid back. “I also kinda have attachment issues.” she joked, snorting.

"Wow." he stared at her hair. "It's so pretty." he seemed genuinely amazed by it. She blushed a little but smiled. "Nancy could cut it, you know." he said, looking at her, and then back to her hair. "She has her license for it and worked at a salon for a while before she moved to New York."

"Really? You know, I'm pretty sure I knew that but it's just been at the back of my brain or something." he smiled. "Okay, my turn. What's something I don't know about you?"

"I hate bees." he said instantly. She raised an eyebrow and started giggling as a vine came to mind. "What?"

"The vine." she said, "My name's Michael with a *B.* " she tried to make herself sound like the guy and he started laughing.

"Shit, I'd have finished it if you didn't make me laugh." she grinned. "But no, I honestly hate them so much like they *terrify* me. I don't

know why. I *hate* their little buzzy buzzy's." she snorted at that.

"Buzz buzz! Buzz buzz! I'ma fuckin' bee mother fucker I'm gon sting you-!" he snorted so hard he almost spit his drink out and barely had time to cover his mouth. She grinned and took her phone out, going to Snapchat and bringing the bee filter up. When he uncovered his mouth she took a picture of him as a bee and showed it to him.

"Get that shit outta here." he joked. She chuckled and titled the video; *Mike has become his greatest enemy.* She saved it and posted it, then put it on Instagram and tagged him. She set her phone down and grinned at him. "God, I haven't laughed that hard in a while."

"I'm glad that my weird ass was able to get you to laugh." he smiled at her. "Okay, wanna continue?" she asked. He nodded.

"What's something I don't know about you?" he repeated. She glanced around, pretending to be sneaky and whispered,

"I wear contacts." he made a face.

"Really?"

"Yep, sadly."

"Dude, how in the hell do I not know this?"

"Because I'm the best at hiding it." she said cheekily. "I have them where my lady stuff is so no one will find them. Same with my glasses, but I haven't worn those in a while. I look like an idiot with them."

"I highly doubt that." he rolled his eyes. "You're cute already, you'll be cute with glasses too." she blushed but gave him a small smile.

"What's something I don't know about you?" she asked.

"I used to have braces."

"Really?"

"Yep, I used to have crooked ass teeth. And braces *suck* because I kept

getting my lips caught on them because I used to bite the hell out of my lips."

"You still do." she pointed out.

"Well, more back then than I do now." he said, "I still wear my retainer every other night, that's why I sound like an idiot in the mornings when I talk." she snorted.

"I honestly thought your brain just hadn't started functioning right yet."

"Well that was part of it." he shrugged and she giggled. "If you pay close attention I have a tiny lisp. And God the spit." he shuttered and she snorted. "I hate it but I'd rather not look like an idiot."

"You wouldn't." she shook her head. "You'd look amazing with crooked teeth. Either way." she shrugged. He felt his cheeks warm up and bit his lip. She smirked and took another bite out of the waffles. "These are so good but Eggos will always be the best."

"Honestly though." he agreed, taking a bite of his own.

A little while later, once they'd finished their waffles and their own hot chocolates respectively, they left in Mike's truck. Despite the town being small, there was a shit ton of traffic, thanks to it being Black Friday, so they were in the truck for a good thirty minutes before they could even get on the *right road* back to her house.

"Just imagine how bad it is in Chicago." El commented. "And in the stores," she shuddered at the thought, "I feel bad for the ones working at Benny's, because *God* it's a nightmare." Mike chuckled.

"I bet. I remember one time, when I was a teenager, I went with my grandpa and Nancy to Wal-mart and holy hell was it the worst day of my life. Okay, well, not really the *worst* day, but you know." he shrugged. She chuckled and nodded. "Have you ever been to the quarry?" she shook her head.

"No, I remember how Will used to talk about it all the time but I never understood what was so great about it."

"Well, you wanna go? I mean, we have plenty of time to kill. It's a lot more than you think." he told her. She nodded and he turned down the next road. A few minutes later, they wound up at the top and her eyes were wide as she took it all in.

"Can we get out?" she asked.

"Yeah, just... don't stand too close to the edge. If you fall you'll die."

"Wow, so blunt." she said, kissing his cheek quickly before hopping out and walking closer. He chuckled to himself and got out, joining her. He didn't go very far from the truck, but she did, only being about two or three feet from the edge. She looked back at him, eyebrows raised. "You're not coming closer?" she asked. He shook his head and stuck his hands in his pocket.

"I'm not exactly a fan of heights." he said, "I almost fell off there, one time."

"Really? How?" she walked back over to him.

"Troy." he explained. "He used to torment the hell out of us when we were younger."

"Hmf, I'm glad I broke his nose. Next time I'll rip his balls off." she walked past him and turned around, taking her phone out. Mike choked on his spit. "Turn around, I wanna take a picture of you." she said. He turned around and raised his eyebrows.

“Gimme a second to recover, woman. Why?”

"Because you look *great* in this lighting." she replied. He grinned at her and she took the picture. She shivered a little and showed it to him.

"For a picture of me, it is pretty good." she scoffed and he chuckled. "C'mon, let's get in the truck. I'll turn the heat back on and we can sit in the back for a little while." she nodded and got in the back seat. Instead of getting out and getting back in through the door, he climbed over the seats, hardly able to get his long ass limbs over it. El giggled, glad that she'd had her camera on still and took a video of him.

"Having a hard time there, bud?" she asked. He looked at her and nodded.

"Not my best work, I'll give you that."

"Well, well, well, that didn't last long." Will said, arms crossed over his chest as Mike and El walked through the door, hand in hand. They glanced at each other, giggling. "Holly wants you two to get married already. I told her maybe in the future but she pouted." Mike snorted but both their cheeks were red at the fact.

"Mike!" Nancy yelled from the kitchen.

"Oh shit, she's here?" he mumbled as he and El made their way to the living room.

"You didn't see my car?" Nancy asked.

"Was a little preoccupied, Nance." he retorted. She rolled her eyes at him. She stood up from the table and gestured for him to follow her.

"I wanna talk to you for a minute, uh, privately. It's about the whole... thing from yesterday." Mike nodded and let go of El's hand, leaning down and kissing her cheek before following his sister to Jonathan's room. Joyce wiggled her eyebrows at her and El rolled her eyes, blushing again but smiling as she sat down.

Mike and Nancy sat across from each other on the bed, both sitting criss cross.

"Okay, first off, later today, Steve and I are going to the house to get more of Holly's clothes and stuff she needs for school so she can stay with us for a while. Is there anything that you might've left that you want?" she asked. He thought for a couple seconds.

"Um, grandpa's guitar is in the basement. I didn't get a chance to get it."

"That's it?" he nodded. "Okay, I'll get it. They probably won't be home, so that's good. Second, last night, me, El, and Joyce talked to Holly about how she should be treated, being a girl, and what she

should do if a boy, of any age, grabs her in any type of way. We basically gave her *that* talk." Mike nodded, biting his lip. "And three, Monday morning, Steve and I are going to call up some lawyers and go to the courthouse and try to find out what we can do to get custody of her. I know you want to get her, Mike, but it's not like you won't ever see her." Mike sighed.

"She's going to New York with you, Nance. I hardly ever see *you* and I actually got to see her every couple months. I went a year without seeing you this past year." Nancy sighed and looked at him. Just *stared* at him for a couple seconds.

"This was supposed to be a surprise but... we're moving." she said, finally. He furrowed his brows.

"Back here?" she shook her head.

"No, Steve's in the process of selling the house, and we're moving to Chicago to be closer to you. It was supposed to be your birthday present but..." she knew it was worth telling him with the way his face lit up.

"Seriously?"

"Yep! It might be an apartment to start with until we find a house but-"

"You can just come stay at the house." Mike told her. "We can make room, like in the basement or something."

"I don't know." she bit her lip. "I don't want it to be crowded, you know? I know you guys are busy as shit most of the time, but still." he shrugged.

"El works four days out of the week, she won't be there in the mornings, and Dustin and I have classes the same days, except Saturday. The other three have afternoon classes so we'll only be there to really sleep. Except on the weekends but you know." she chuckled.

"I'll talk to Steve about it. I know Holly would love to stay with you." Mike grinned. "But we are staying in his house until we get

everything taken care of, since we can't just take her with us to Chicago, because of school. We'll have to transfer." Mike nodded in understanding. Before he could say anything else, there was a loud yelp from the living room.

"What the fu-frick, El!" Dustin exclaimed. Nancy and Mike looked at each other and Mike snickered, having an idea as to what happened. The two walked into the living room, where he, Max, and Lucas were with Hopper and Will. El looked their way when she heard them. She grinned at Mike and pointed at Dustin, who had a hand on his cheek.

"Told you I was gonna slap him next time I see him."

7. Chapter Seven

Notes for the Chapter:

> Oof it's been a minute, sorry about that! Life has not been pleasant at all and my family and I were basically forced to move (long story) but I hope everyone is doing okay!
>
> I hope you guys like the chapter! Four more chapters after this one and we'll be getting into BRAND NEW content!! :D

"Why exactly did you tell him that you were gonna slap me?" Dustin asked. Max was trying to keep her laughter in, Will and Hopper were grinning from ear to ear, and Lucas just looked confused.

"Because of your little plan." she said, shrugging. He made a face, and then looked at Mike.

" *That* plan?" he squeaked.

"Mm hm." Mike nodded.

"What was the result?" he asked immediately, starting to grin.

"You're a dick, for starters, just wanna clarify that." El said as Mike made his way over to them. He draped an arm around El's shoulder and she leaned into him.

"So rude." Dustin whined.

"They're gonna get married!" Holly shrieked from the other side of the house. Max raised an eyebrow.

"Did you tell her?" she stage-whispered.

"She kissed him and made him wet his pants." Hopper quipped.

"Um, no, that's *not* how that went, thank you very much." Mike pointed at Hopper who snickered. The other three just stared at the

two.

"We were outside talking, and I just said screw it- I really said fuck it, " she whispered, "and kissed him. Will saw us and yelled and scared us, and Mike fell off the porch into the snow and it made his pants look like he peed himself."

"You always were a big ass scaredy-cat." Max shook her head. "So are you two like together or?" they nodded, grinning, and Max squealed - which was *very* unlike her- and tackled them so hard they almost fell over. She clung to Mike like a monkey but had her arms wrapped around them both.

"Jesus, Max." Mike grunted a little, holding her up. El giggled.

"I better be the maid of honor at your wedding." Mike groaned and dropped her. She let out a little huff and smacked him.

"If I had fell on my ass I'd have really made you piss yourself."

"Wouldn't be the first time." he muttered to himself, but El heard him and looked at him, eyes wide.

"Max made you pee yourself?" she asked. Max started cackling and Mike's cheeks turned a *bright* shade of red.

“I hate *all* of you.” he grumbled.

“That’s not what you said last night!” El quipped and his face burned hotter.

“We have many embarrassing stories about Mike if you’d like to hear them, El.” Lucas said, grinning from ear to ear. If looks could kill...

"I have a few myself, you know." Joyce said, walking into the room, wiggling her eyebrows.

"Please don't." he begged. "I embarrass myself in front of her enough as it is already."

"Like when you crawled into the back seat from the front and looked like you were gonna split in half?" she asked, grinning.

"Exactly!"

Thursday, November 30, 2017

True to her word, Nancy and Steve were calling around and getting information, but Mike kind of already took care of it, as he'd sent Adriana their way. Well, not really, he just gave her Nancy's number and as far as he knew, they've been talking quite a bit.

The group had *immediately* gone back to work, studying for their midterms. Mike and Dustin had three midterms, two on one day, one on another, and a three page essay due, *and* they both had to learn a song and make a video of them performing it and submit it by midnight on Friday, since that would be the last day before winter break, which would last all the way into January.

El had a midterm in every class, but she'd explained to them that they weren't very difficult, as she had algebra, physical science, economics and some English thing they could never remember the name of. All she had to do was study for the tests, and edit pictures. Max had calculus and computer science theory to do, and a two page essay on game design and development . Lucas only had two midterms this week too, but he had four labs. One every morning up until Thursday and two on Friday and he was done. Will had two animation projects he had to do that would count as a test grade, and he was pretty happy with it, because he was done before everyone else.

"Mike! What song do you want to do?" Dustin whined, walking into the living room from the kitchen. Mike's face was buried in the cushions and he didn't respond. Max and El came downstairs together and Max raised her eyebrow at Dustin, who waved his hands dramatically at Mike.

"You think he's actually suffocated himself this time?" Max asked El.

"I hope not." she said. She crouched next to Mike's head and nudged him. He grunted. "He's fine. Mike, you good?" he mumbled something into the cushion. "What? You know I can't understand when you do that." he groaned and turned his head, keeping his eyes closed.

"I have a headache." he grumbled. "And I don't fucking care what song we do, Dustin. Just chose something we already *know* ."

"But we're supposed to do one we don't know."

"It's not like he's gonna know!" Mike threw a pillow at him. Dustin huffed.

"Are you still pissed about the Abigail thing? Because I've said I'm sorry a *million* times now, dude."

"No." Mike groaned, rolling onto his back. "I *just* said my head hurts. Leave me *alone* ." he looked at Dustin, who stared at him expectantly. "Let's just do Imagine by John Lennon." Mike sighed.

"Really?" Dustin asked, excitedly.

"Yeah, I know the guitar version."

"Good, because we were originally supposed to use a different instrument anyways. I'll go get my laptop ready to record." he ran down to the basement and Mike sighed.

"You wanna come watch us? Make sure I don't like, kill him while I'm down there?" El snorted and nodded, getting up with him.

"I'm gonna go see if we have Tylenol or anything." he nodded and kissed her cheek, following Dustin. She came down with a cup of water and two pills as he was tuning his guitar. He gave her a smile and took them quickly, finishing the cup of water in two big gulps. "You fucking fish." she muttered. He snorted and grinned at her as she jumped onto a bean bag.

Mike and Dustin managed to do the song in only three takes, which Mike was thankful for, because as soon as they were done, he showered and passed out in his bed. It was only ten, when he usually went to bed at twelve or one most nights.

"How much you wanna bet he's getting sick?" Max said, stealing a handful of popcorn from Will's bowl.

"Ugh, doesn't he always get sick as fuck around this time?" Lucas

asked.

"It's usually when break starts and we're all back home." she said.

"He gets sick every year around this time?" El asked, making a face.

"Yeah, it's a constant thing, since he was little I think. He doesn't get sick much, just a few colds here and there but this one hits him *hard* . He's difficult to take care of most of the time, I don't know how his mom did it." she shook her head. She frowned. "She won't be taking care of him anymore, that's for damn sure. The fucking bitch." she dug her hand in the popcorn aggressively.

"I can." El said, shrugging. "I mean, I *am* his girlfriend and roommate so..."

"I'll help too." Max told her. "Because you'll need it. He's a big ass baby when he's sick." El chuckled.

"I just lay miserably in my bed when I get sick, 'cause I didn't want anyone helping me and shit."

"Mike'll wait on you hand and foot if you get sick." Will said. "It's just his nature, he does it for us too." El smiled. They talked for a few more minutes and El went to bed herself, slightly worried about him getting sick.

Friday, December 1, 2017

5 PM

"Where's Mike?" El asked, walking inside after getting off work. She'd gone in later so she had to work a couple extra hours. "His truck isn't here."

"He went to the library. You just missed him." Dustin said.

"Why'd he go to the library? And he took his truck?"

"He had to do a little bit of research for his essay." Lucas explained. Then he shrugged. "He's probably just being a lazy ass." she rolled her

eyes at that and nodded.

"Oh okay. I'm gonna go shower and start cooking soon."

"Ooh what are you cooking?" Will asked, grinning at her.

"Food." she replied, making her way upstairs.

"No really? I thought you were gonna cook my shoes!" El stopped and looked over the railing,

"Didn't that technically happen on SpongeBob?"

"I think so." he snorted. She chuckled and went upstairs.

Two hours later, El had taken her shower and had already finished dinner, and Mike still wasn't back and he wasn't answering her texts.

"He's probably turned his phone off, Max, calm down." Lucas said as Max typed furiously on her phone.

"He doesn't do that, Lucas." she grumbled. "He puts it on vibrate when he's at the library."

"I'm gonna go check on him." El said, standing up. "Or at least see if he's still at the library." she slipped on her jacket.

"Are you sure you'll be okay to walk there?" Will asked, furrowing his brows. She nodded.

"Yeah, it's only a couple blocks away. I'll text you when I get there." she said, putting her shoes on, grabbing her phone and walking out the door. It didn't take her but ten minutes to get there and she saw his truck in the parking lot. She texted Will and told him she was there and that he was too. She walked in and almost immediately, one of the workers walked up to her.

"Do you know a tall, dark haired guy with curly hair?" she asked. El nodded.

"That's my boyfriend." she told her.

"I think he's sick or something, because he worked for about an hour and then laid his head down and went to sleep. I see him here a lot and he was really pale in comparison." El nodded.

"I think he is too, actually. I'll take care of him." the girl pointed to the section he was in and she thanked her before heading that way. He was the only one there, sitting at a table with his laptop on the table next to an open book, with his head down. She smiled a small smile and knelt next to him once she reached him. She tapped his shoulder a couple times. "Mike." she whispered. "Mikey, wake up." she poked him a little harder and he grunted and turned his head towards her. He opened his eyes slowly and blinked a couple times. She smiled at him. "Hey sleepy head, let's get you home." he sat up and rubbed at one of his eyes.

"Shit, I didn't mean to fall asleep. My head started hurting again." he mumbled as he started packing his stuff up. El closed the book and went and put it back in it's spot, as she'd had to use it before once. She came back and he was standing, his bag over one shoulder. She stood in front of him and leaned up, kissing him on the cheek.

"Come on, you're going to eat and then go to bed as soon as we get home."

"I have to edit my paper and send it in. And I'm not hungry." he complained.

"I'll help you, okay? And you need to eat a little something. Have you eaten today?" she asked. "Gimme your keys." he reached into his pocket and handed them to her. He nodded.

"This morning." she sighed quietly and patted his arm as he rounded the truck to the other side, getting in at the same time as her.

"Max wasn't kidding when she said it hits you hard, huh?"

"Huh?" he made a face. "Max?"

"She told me you were getting sick." she explained. He started grumbling to himself and leaned his head on the window. "Do you still have a headache?" he nodded slightly. "I'll get you something and

I'll make you something to eat. I made spaghetti but I'll make you something else if you want."

"I don't want anything." he whined. She gave him a look and he sighed. "I'll just eat some 'sgehtti." she smiled. "But when I puke it up I blame you." she snorted loudly and he grinned a dopey little grin.

"When you puke, I'll hold your long ass hair back for you." he chuckled.

"Thanks in advance." he muttered and let out a loud sneeze. "Fuck."

"Bless you." he smiled at her in thanks.

When they got back to the house a few minutes later, Max was waiting with Tylenol, a cup of water and a thermometer.

"Dammit, Mike. Why do you always get sick around this time?" she whined/asked. He glared at her.

"Not my fault." he sat in the middle of the couch and took the Tylenol from her, along with the cup. She put the thermometer in his mouth to shut him up and felt his forehead. It was warm, but not too bad.

"Okay, lemme play doctor for a minute." Max said, sitting beside him. El got in the other spot next to him and put her head on his shoulder. "Sore throat, you just feel like shit, and a runny nose and sneezing?" Mike nodded. "No like, urge to puke or anything?"

"No."

"Alright," Max sighed. "If I get sick because of you, I'm gonna kill you. I'll go call Lucas and tell him to get medicine on while he's at the store." Mike nodded and Max went back upstairs. "El, check the thermometer in about a minute." she called.

She waited a minute or so, and took the thermometer out and squinted at it. "How the fuck do you read this thing." he snorted and took it from her. He looked at it couple seconds and said,

"98.4. Not necessarily a fever but getting there." he put it on the table and rubbed at his eyes again. "Why couldn't it have waited until like,

we fucking got back home. I don't wanna sit in a car for three hours while I'm dying." she rolled her eyes at that. “And what am I supposed to do about the midterms and shit? Can’t just call in sick for that.” he sneezed into his shirt immediately after that.

"We can just wait until you're feeling better." she said. "Don't worry about it. I’ll have Dustin talk to your teachers and you can email them and tell them. I'm gonna go get you something to eat and a Gatorade if we have any." she patted his knee and stood up. He gave her a smile. She went in the kitchen while he unpacked everything he needed. He turned so he was leaning against the arm and stretched his legs out, sighing and stretching completely, letting out a strangled grunt/scream. "What the hell was that?" El called.

"Mike's mating call!" Dustin yelled back, coming up the stairs from the basement. Mike flipped him off. El laughed and poked her head in the living room.

"Give this to him, please." El told him, tossing Dustin a Gatorade. He handed it to Mike, doing a weird stance so he wouldn't get close to him.

"Really?" Mike deadpanned, snatching the bottle from him. Dustin snickered and nodded.

"Yeah, really. I can't afford to get sick right now dude." Mike rolled his eyes and flipped him off again. "When and where?" Mike threw a pillow at him and knocked his hat off. Dustin giggled and went off upstairs. Mike huffed and grabbed his laptop and opened it. Max and Will joined him in the living room, sitting on the opposite side, as El came back from the kitchen with a bowl, fork and napkin.

"Fuck me!" Mike whined, throwing his head back.

"See? Mating call."

"Not while you're sick, Mike." El retorted, putting the bowl on the table beside him. He blushed bright red as Max and Will cackled from their spots.

"Not what I meant." he muttered. "It didn't save my conclusion so I

have to write it again."

"Here," El handed him the bowl and she took the laptop, sitting in the space between his legs and the back of the couch. "Eat and I'll edit. Then you can write your conclusion, m'kay?" she said, not waiting for an answer.

"Don't baby him too much, he'll get used to it." Max said cheekily. Mike flipped her off.

"'Cause he's a wittle baby!" El leaned over and poked his cheek and he rolled his eyes, trying not to smile. She grinned and started reading his essay. He finished the food a few minutes after she was done and set it on the coffee table, doing grabby hands at the computer. She chuckled and handed it to him.

"This conclusion is gonna be fucking four sentences, give or take a few. I don't even care." he muttered, typing away. They laughed. It ended up being eight sentences, but they didn't have to know that. By the time he was done, Lucas had finally arrived with whatever he'd gone to the store for, and Mike some medicine. He tossed the bag to Mike and it landed in his crotch. "Ow, you fuck!" he threw a pillow his way but missed terribly, causing Lucas to giggle.

"I got you some of that Theraflu shit, cough medicine and nasal spray, which I know you hate."

"You hate me, don't you Lucas?" Mike accused.

"Just because I like watching you suffer doesn't mean I hate you." Lucas said, shrugging like it was obvious.

"Fuck you."

"Mike's a dick when he's sick, usually." Will told El.

"Just to you guys, because you love to fucking irritate me." he grumbled, picking at the plastic on one of the bottles. He gave up and just tore it off with his teeth. "Stupid plastic."

"You guys are insane." El chuckled, wiggling a little from her spot over Mike's legs. "I'm not bothering you sitting here, am I?" she asked.

He shook his head, throwing back the small cup of medicine. He made a face and drank some Gatorade.

"Nah. You don't weigh anything so you're fine." she snorted and nodded.

"Why are you guys so abusive to poor Mikey?" El asked childishly.

"Yeah!" Mike pouted, crossing his arms and glaring at them. Max snickered.

"He always gets us sick too."

"Not always. You didn't get sick last year." Mike stuck his tongue out at him.

"No but that weird freshman roommate of yours did." Will pointed out.

"Don't talk about her." Mike cringed. "God, something was seriously wrong in her head."

"I personally think she smoked crack or something." Lucas said.

"I don't know but ugh." he cringed again. El raised her eyebrows at him. "You don't wanna know." he told her. She chuckled and nodded. She stood up.

"Do you want to take a shower or anything?" El asked. He shook his head. "Okay, I'm gonna go take one so I don't have to in the morning." he nodded and she kissed the top of his head before giving the others a peace sign and heading up the stairs. Mike watched her go with a dopey ass grin on his face.

"Jeez, Wheeler, you're really in love, huh?" Max asked, grinning at him. He rolled his eyes and flipped her off... fondly.

"Yeah." he mumbled, biting his lip. He turned so he was sitting up right, his feet on the floor, and put his laptop back in his bag and put it on the couch, throwing the medicine back in the grocery bag, along with the bottle of Gatorade, and stood up, picking up his bowl.

"I can take it, Mike." Will told him, going to stand up but Mike waved him off.

"I'm not so sick that I can't do anything, but thanks." he gave him a smile and went into the kitchen to clean his bowl out. He blew his nose before going back in the living room and grabbing his stuff. "I'ma go to bed, I'll see you guys tomorrow." he said, making his way up the stairs. He heard the three respond with “night” or in Max's case, “nighty nighty, Mikey!”

He didn't even bother turning on the light, he just half assed shut the door behind him. El was still in the shower, obviously as she hadn't been up here ten minutes, so he opened the other boxes and took the medicine and then used the nasal spray, cussing Lucas out in his head the entire time. He dropped the few bottles on his desk and threw the bag in the small trashcan next to his desk.

He pulled back the covers and plopped down and stretched out, and grabbed his phone off the table, pulling up Instagram.

A while later, Mike put his phone down and reached over, turning his lamp on, having meant to do that before he got in bed, just as El came out of the bathroom. He looked over at her and saw that her hair was down, but it was straight.

"What?" she asked, setting her earrings on her dresser.

"Your hair." he said, lying back.

"Oh, yeah, I straightened it. That's why I was in there so long."

"I thought you were washing it or something." he shrugged.

"Nah, I washed it yesterday. It gets too dry if I wash it everyday. I also wanted to see how it looks now that Nancy fixed it." she tossed her phone on her bed and crawled next to him, leaning against the headboard too. "The meds help any yet?" she asked.

"It looks very good.” he smiled at her. “And I still feel like shit but my head's not hurting anymore."

"That’s good, I guess." she crossed her ankles and gave him a grin. He

grinned back at her. “You wanna watch Netflix?”

Saturday, December 2, 2017

When El woke up the next morning, at nine thirty, Mike was sitting up in his bed, hunched over and looking miserable. She rubbed her eyes and sat up, throwing the blankets off her.

"Hey, you alright?" she asked. He looked over at her for a second, made a face and sneezed five times rapidly, barely covering his mouth and nose with his elbow.

She grimaced and got up, going to the bathroom and bringing him a wad of toilet paper. He blew his nose and she almost laughed at the noise.

“Sounds like a baby elephant, I know.” he croaked. She giggled a little and sat next to him. "You're gonna... get sick," he said, "being so close to me."

"I don't care." she shrugged. He gave her a look. "I don't! I'll be fine, Mike. I’m a tough cookie" she waved a hand. She sat back on her heels.

"I'm gonna get ready for work, think you'll be alright?" he nodded.

"Yeah, if I need anything I'll just... text Max or something." he grunted as he scooted back down into a lying down position. "Because I sure as hell ain't getting out of this bed unless I gotta pee." she chuckled and nodded, pulling his cover back over him and ruffling his hair.

He was asleep when she came back out, so she kissed his head and moved his trash can next to the bed, and put a roll of toilet paper- they didn’t have any tissues- and a cup of water on his nightstand, grabbed her things as quietly as she could and went downstairs.

"Ah, just the girl I was looking for." Max grinned at her. El smiled back and let out a snort. “You were up front and center for that sneezing fit, huh?”

“I absolutely was, like four feet away from it.” she snorted again and grabbed one of the small bottles of orange juice out of the fridge. “He sounds like Kermit the Frog mixed with an elephant when he blows his nose.” Max laughed and nodded.

"The poor turd, he’ll be sounding like Kermit for a few days. I'll keep checking on him today since I don't have anywhere to be. He's in good hands." El smiled.

"I know. I don't have the best experience with taking care of sick people."

"The only reason I do is because these fuckers get sick a lot, whether it be the flu or just a cold." El chuckled. "Considering he's a big baby, he'll want to cuddle and shit when you get home so be prepared for that." El grinned and nodded.

"Thanks for the heads up. I don't mind cuddling." Max snorted at that.

"I don't know how you people do it, man, it gets so *hot* ." El shrugged.

"I'm usually cold as shit so." she grinned, and looked at her phone. "Okay, I better get going. If he gets like, really bad, call me. I'm gonna keep my phone on me."

"I doubt it'll get much worse than this, but I will."

“Thank you, I'll see you later!"

"Have a good day!" Max yelled as she shut the door.

El had been checking on Mike a good bit, with Max, but it wasn't until about four thirty when Mike sent a text to the group chat.

The Par-tayy

(4:31) Magic Mike- (video of idk wtf just happened)

(4:31) Magic Mike- my fingers when i blow my nose and snot just shoots through it.

(4:32) Willy Will- lmao more like your sanity when you're sick

(4:32) Dusty- that’s the equivalent of your finges going through the paper when you poop.

(4:33) Magic Mike- Fuck you Will

(4:33) Magic Mike- you too, Dustin. Nasty

(4:34) Eleven- whoa now, calm down children. It's not nice to cuss. And that is gross lmao

(4:34) Magic Mike- >;p

(4:35) Stalker- mike what even the fuck

(4:36) Magic Mike- fuck off man im sick don't judge

(4:38) Dusty- we judge you when you're not sick why would we stop now

(4:45) Dusty- did he die

(4:46) Zoomer- no he just fell asleep

(4:46) Zoomer- (pic of Mike cuddled up next to Max)

(4:47) Eleven- omg i wish i wasn't at work

(4:48) Eleven- you think benny would be mad if i told him mike was sick and i needed to go to him

(4:49) Dusty- no benny's cool and all for true love

(4:50) Eleven- *middle finger*

(5:24) Eleven- I'M OTW HOME DONT' WAKE THE BABY UP

(5:25) Zoomer- even when you get here?

(5:25) Eleven- yes

(5:26) Zoomer- lmao okay

(5:28) Zoomer- also Dustin you’re so fuckign gross bro.

(5:9) Dusty- shut

El arrived back at home about fifteen minutes later, and Max was walking down the stairs as El started to go up.

"Oh, hey." El gave her a grin. "He still asleep?" Max nodded.

"Yeah, I'm gonna see if I can find anything for him to eat." El nodded.

"Toast." she told her. "At least, that would be all I'd eat when I was sick."

"Gotcha, I'll make it and bring it up." El nodded again and continued up the stairs. She heard a laugh coming from their room and she made a face, and rolled her eyes with a smile at the sight before her, leaning on the door frame. Dustin and Lucas were on either side of Mike now, hugging him. He was squirming, trying to get away but was too weak to actually get anywhere.

"What happened to you two not wanting to get sick?" she asked, and all three jumped and Lucas let out a squeak, and Mike groaned.

"I hate you." he croaked, squirming again. "Get away." he whined.

"Okay first, get off him." she told them. "And second, didn't I tell you not to wake him up?"

They scrambled off the bed and Mike stopped squirming, instead rolling onto the middle of the bed and stretching, letting out a tiny grunt, his cheeks red as fire.

"Sorry. And he woke up when Max got up so we wanted to take her place." Dustin said innocently. Lucas nodded in agreement, but looked at Mike.

"You might wanna go take a shower, dude, you fucking reek."

" *You* tink." Mike muttered, sitting up and running a hand through his hair, causing it to stick up wildly. Dustin snickered and Mike flipped him off.

"Tink?" Lucas asked. "Like Tinkerbell?" Mike threw a pillow at him.

"If I have to get up 'cause of you, I'ma beat your ass." he grumbled, getting up.

"Why are you getting up?" Lucas smirked.

"I've gotta fucking pee." he didn't necessarily slam the bathroom door, but it was enough to make the three jump.

"Mr. Grumpy Pants. Come on, let's go pack." Dustin pouted. El rolled her eyes and flicked them both on the back of the head. She shut the door behind them and went to fix Mike's sheets, since they were nearly sliding off the bed, but when she pulled back the blanket, there was a giant wet spot in the form of a body. She cringed a little and just pulled them off completely. He came back out and froze.

"What're you doing?" he asked.

"Your sheets are soaking wet with sweat." she explained. "And I'm sure your clothes are too. I think you should take a cool shower and change."

"But..." he gestured to the bed, pouting a little. She chuckled.

"You can get in my bed, Mike." she told him. "I know you don't feel like showering, but I'm sure it'd make you feel better. Then I'll lay with you, okay?" he sighed quietly and nodded. He walked past her to his dresser and got clean clothes. She dropped the sheets in a pile on the floor and held her arms out to him, and he hugged her, leaning down and burying his face in her hair.

"I'm sorry I'm being such a baby about this. I feel like shit and I'm usually sick when I'm at home and with my mom and... now I have to get used to her not fussing over me."

"I know." she said quietly, rubbing his back. "I'm sorry for the way she's acting. She doesn't deserve you as her son." he sniffed a little and nodded.

Please don't start crying, please don't start crying. If you cry I'll cry and I've cried in front of you enough- holy shit thank God.

Mike pulled away from her, resting his forehead on hers for a second

before stepping away.

"I'ma get you sick." he muttered.

"Michael." she scolded. "If you do, I don't *care* . I'm not gonna leave you alone while you're sick. You're stuck with me for the next *month.* " he smiled.

"Hopefully a lot longer than *that.* " he pointed out. She blushed and grinned cheekily, winking at him.

"Go get in the shower, mister. I'll have the bed all cozy for you, with something to eat." he grimaced at the mention of food, but nodded, making his way back into the bathroom. As soon as the door shut, she sighed and picked up the sheets and blanket, deciding to worry about his hundred pillows later, and took them downstairs. She put them in the hamper for the time being and went in the kitchen with Max, who wasn't making the toast yet. She looked up from her phone when she heard El huff and sit at the island.

"You okay?" she asked, tucking it in her pocket and leaning on her arms in front of her.

"No." El scoffed. "I wanna fucking punch his mom in the *face.* "

"Same." Max sighed. "I still don't know what she said to him *exactly* but it wasn't just that she didn't want him home for Thanksgiving or Christmas. She said something to upset him as much as it did."

"Hopefully he'll tell you, because then we can go beat her ass." she grumbled. Max chuckled.

"If he tells either of us what it was, we'll let each other know and go to her ass immediately." she held out a hand to El, who giggled and shook her hand. "She hasn't always been like that, you know." she said. El looked at her, an eyebrow raised. "She used to be like a mom to me. She wasn't fucking around with other men five years ago, she actually tried to be a mom to them. She drinks too, you see, but she drinks wine. She doesn't drink the cheap liquor shit Ted does, but either way it didn't help the situation. She slowly started drinking more and more as Ted stopped paying her any attention, and she

started sneaking off when we were sixteen. Mike knew about it, but didn't tell us about it for a while. He didn't really care, he'd seen it coming."

"Wow."

"Yeah, that's not all though. They were all younger guys, too, the youngest being eighteen, 'cause ya know, laws and shit." El nodded. "As of right now, she's fucking around with my step-brother, Billy. The one I wish would go die in a hole, remember me talking about him?"

"Boy do I. I wanna stick my foot so far up his ass it'll get stuck." Max snorted and nodded in agreement.

"I think he's fucking with her head, royally. I think that's why she's acting the way she is. How much you wanna bet her and Ted will immediately agree to give custody to Nance?"

"I know they will." she scoffed. "God, why do most of us have such shitty parents or family members? You, with your step dad and Billy, Will with his dad, Mike and his parents. My parents were abusive when I lived with them, before Hopper."

"It's a fucked up world." Max shrugged. "But I know one thing." she put a hand over El's and she looked up. "We learned from our parents' mistakes, and we will treat our children a hundred times better than they treated us."

8. Chapter Eight

The two once again lied in bed that night and watched Netflix before going to sleep.

"I'm sorry you feel so bad." El said to Mike as he turned over towards her.

"S'not your fault. It's a yearly thing." he sniffed, and groaned quietly when he realized he still couldn't breath out of his nose fully. "I'm a mouth breather now, great." he grumbled. she giggled.

"You never realize how good you have it until you get a stuffy nose." he let out a small huff of laughter and nodded.

"Dustin once asked me how he could unstuff his nose."

"I thought he was smart?" she joked.

"He is... sometimes. Book smarts, but not street smarts."

"Shouldn't that technically be book smarts though?" Mike didn't answer for a minute and let out what sounded like an attempted snort. she laughed at that and he grimaced, before chuckling lowly.

"Ugh, that felt and sounded horrible."

"It did." she agreed. He tilted his head back, where he could see her face. His cheeks were flushed red, his nose as well- he looked like Rudolph and she couldn't help but giggle a little at that- and his eyes were red rimmed, just slightly.

"What?" he asked. She reached up and brushed some hair out of his face.

"You just look cute." he made a face.

"I'm sick." she snorted.

"So? Still cute." his cheeks got noticeably darker but she didn't say anything, she just grinned. "You look like Rudolph, with your red

nose."

"Thanks." he deadpanned, and coughed into his elbow for a second. She smiled sadly and ran a hand through his hair. He closed his eyes and sighed deeply when she scraped her nails lightly against his scalp. She smiled. Her eyes flickered to his lips, which were parted slightly so he could breathe, and she wanted to kiss him, thinking that she probably wouldn't get sick, but ultimately decided against it because she knew he'd complain about getting her sick. She knew she'd probably get sick when they were back in Hawkins, but she didn't really care. Other than the urge to kiss him, she noticed how dry they were, and furrowed her brows.

"Mike, do you own chapstick?"

"What's chapstick?" he muttered sleepily. She giggled and reached over to her night stand and grabbed the small thing of Carmex and opened it, putting a good bit on her finger and gently putting it on his lips. He scrunched his nose at the feeling, but didn't say anything.

"Rub your lips together real quick." she told him and he did, opening his eyes.

"Thanks." he whispered. She gave him a smile and kissed his forehead.

"I'm gonna text dad and let him know the deal and then I'll play with your hair, 'kay?" she asked and he nodded.

"Your hair is pretty." he mumbled, closing his eyes and moving his head a little, to where her chin could rest on the top of his head if she wanted. "You're pretty. So pretty. Beautiful." she smiled and could feel her cheeks heat up, and was sure he could feel and hear her heartbeat speed up. He wrapped one arm around her stomach, fisting the back of her shirt.

"So are you." she told him, honestly. He made an affronted noise and she laughed. "It's true! You're pretty, beautiful for a guy. Still handsome either way, *but* I think those two words suit you better, to me." A rumbling noise came from him, and she realized he was humming. She smiled and brushed hair out of his face again, before

grabbing her phone and texting her dad. Mike ended up falling asleep, thankfully, a few minutes after she started playing with his hair, and she followed soon after, despite it being so early.

They were woken up by Max at nine thirty, when she brought them both dinner and Mike his medicine. She'd eaten with them, and told them that they would wake them up in the morning before they left, wished them goodnight, and took the dishes back downstairs. El took a quick shower and changed into a pair of shorts and a tank top before joining Mike again, this time, her head was on his shoulder- as he'd been sprawled out like a starfish and she didn't have anywhere else to go- with an arm draped over his chest, and the two went back to sleep.

Friday, December 8, 2017

The next couple days got a little easier for the both of them, Mike stopped throwing up everything he ate- excluding toast or crackers- on Monday, and was feeling better, other than his entire body aching at some point or another, but that's what medicine was for, and he told El that he'd feel up to leaving on Thursday, but she decided to wait until Friday, just in case. They'd gone to be earlier than they usually would Thursday night, the two deciding to share Mike's bed - since it was bigger- from now on.

Hawkins

3 PM

"Looks like Michael here has finally come back from the dead." Steve said, smirking as Mike and El walked into the Byers/Hopper house.

"Shut... your face." he put a hand over Steve's face as he passed him and Steve snorted.

"Mom! Dad!" El shrieked. "We're home! Wait, dad's at work, shit." Mike snickered. Nancy and Joyce came into the living room from the kitchen, wearing matching grins as they hugged the two. Jonathan, Will and Holly followed soon after.

"Mike, you look like shit." Nancy said brightly, pulling away from him.

"Thanks." he deadpanned. "I haven't felt like shit at all this week, so I'm not sure why I look it." she laughed, reaching up and ruffling his hair.

"But really, you look tired. Did you get enough sleep this week?" he nodded.

"He took like five naps a day." El said, holding her arms out for a hug from Nancy. She chuckled and hugged her back as Joyce pulled Mike in tightly. "Which, to me, would be a major accomplishment."

"How are you feeling, Sweetie? Do you still feel sick? I can make you something to eat if you want-"

"No, no, I'm fine." he said, smiling at her. "Thank you though. El took good care of me." El smiled at him. "Holly doll! Looks like you got a little taller in the last two weeks." He said, crouching in front of her. She stuck her tongue out.

"It's not my fault you're a daddy long legs who is as tall as me when he's *crouching* ." she sassed. He snorted and held his arms out, and she hugged him.

"Ready to geek out for the next three weeks with me?"

"Heck yeah!" she exclaimed, letting him go so she could hug El.

"Jesus, no one's gonna hug me?" Jonathan asked, pouting. Mike rolled his eyes and stood up, knees cracking, and hugged him.

"Michael!" El squeaked.

"Eleven!" he squeaked right back and she glared. He winked at her and she chuckled.

"Ew, quit undressing each other with your eyes. There are children present." Steve said, making a face at them.

"There's only one child here." Mike corrected.

"I'm talking about you too, Wheeler. You're a child in my book until you're twenty one. And you still have a couple weeks."

"Oh, what a joyous time that'll be, too, eh?" He replied sarcastically. Steve chuckled. "And I'm not saying I'm not glad to see you guys but like, don't you have your own house?" Nancy snorted.

"Yeah, but we figured you two would come here instead of there so we decided to just come over." she told him.

"Uh huh." He gave her a look. "Are you sure that's all it is?"

"Um, I think so?" she shrugged. "Everything's going good so far, with the custody/guardianship thing. They're both willing to sign." Mike scoffed.

"Good. Fucking dickheads." she nodded and patted him on the shoulder before following Joyce and Holly back into the kitchen, where they were making sugar cookies.

"Walk with me, Wheeler." Steve said, throwing an arm around his shoulders and leading him towards the front door. Mike looked back at the other three.

"Help." He mouthed.

"No." El mouthed back and grinned at him. He stuck his tongue out at her and let out a sigh as Steve opened the door and they walked back into the cold air.

"Dude, I'm still not feeling a hundred percent. I don't feel like being out here." He whined.

"It's only gonna take a minute, calm your tits."

"Okay, Dustin." Steve flipped him off.

"I wanted to ask you for permission to marry your sister." He said, without missing a beat. Mike stared at him for a second.

"What?"

"I wanted to ask you for-"

"No, I heard you. Holy shit, I mean, I figured you were already gonna get married."

"I haven't even proposed yet. Or got permission." He raised an eyebrow at him.

"Hell yeah, dude. You can marry the hell out of her as long as you treat her right. I might be a baby giraffe but I've got a mean right hook." Steve snorted and nodded.

"Good, good. I'd never hurt her, you know that. And trust me, I know. I've seen it in action." Mike snickered.

"When are you gonna propose to her?"

"Christmas. Cheesy, I know, but I've heard her mention it to Barb."

"Good, you *listen* . Jesus, when we were kids she would freak the fuck out to mom about how cute it would be." He shook his head. Steve chuckled at then, but then frowned slightly.

"Uh, how're you doing? With... everything?" Mike sighed.

"Good as I can get, I guess." He shrugged. "It shouldn't have surprised me, all this bullshit with my parents. I'm just glad everything's going good in that sense." Steve nodded. "And uh, thank you, for going along with Nancy. To get custody of Holly, you know?"

"Of course, Mike, I love Holly. Hell, I love *you* and the rest of your little, well, not so little seeing as you're taller than me now, nerd friends. You're like the little brothers and sisters I never asked for." Mike snorted, rolling his eyes.

"Yeah yeah, I love you too, Harrington. So, can I see the ring?"

Inside, Nancy, El and Will were in El's room, talking.

"How're things with you and Mike?" Nancy asked, nudging her.

"He hasn't let me kiss him in a week." she pouted. Will rolled his eyes.

"Would you rather get sick?" He asked.

"Duh. Otherwise I wouldn't be pouting." Nancy chuckled, shaking her head at them.

"But everything's going well in general, I take it?" she asked. El nodded.

"Yeah. He loves me, and I love him." Will raised an eyebrow. She sighed and looked at Nancy, who was confused. "Falling in love with him is one of the hardest things I've ever done." Nancy made a face. "And I don't mean it in a bad way. He's not hard to fall in love with, he's *amazing.* It's because of the whole Bradley situation."

They continued on their conversation, until Mike and Steve came back in, Mike whining about the cold and how he was sick and that it was *neglect* for them to let him stay out there so long. El just rolled her eyes, shooed everyone else out of the room and made him take a nap while she edited her pictures. Soon though, her eyes were starting to bother her so she got up off the bed to change them.

"You've gotta be *fucking* kidding me." El groaned as she dug through her bag. Mike grunted and looked back at her from where he was laying on his stomach.

"What?" He asked sleepily.

"I can't find my contacts." she huffed. "I swear I put them in here."

"Do you have your glasses?" He asked. She scrunched her nose and nodded, sighing.

"I do. I have a pair here and back at the house, just in case. Guess that was smart on my part." she grumbled, going over to her night stand and taking a pair of black rimmed glasses out. "I don't wanna put them on." she whined.

"Why?"

"I look stupid with them on."

"Nah." he shook his head, rolling onto his back. She raised an

eyebrow at him. He raised his back at her. "El," he let out a quiet laugh, "You'd look beautiful with a potato sack dress on, never mind the glasses." she blushed a bright red and he grinned. She sighed.

"Fine..." she went to the bathroom and came back a minute later, but without the glasses. They were still in her hand. She squinted at him, but he was still blurry.

"You look like you're looking at the sun. I mean, I know I'm very bright because I'm so pale but... No need to stare." she giggled at that. "C'mere." He patted the space next to him and she made her way to him, plopping down and putting the glasses in his outstretched hand. He opened them and put them on for a second, and the face he made made her laugh. "Jeez, you are blind. Here." he put them on for her, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear in the process. He grinned widely. "See, beautiful." her cheeks had yet to go from red to their normal color, so she was positive they were even brighter.

"You look better with the glasses." Is what she replied with. He snorted.

"I'd hope so. If not, I'd be pretty offended."

Saturday, December 9, 2017

Mike had stayed the night with El, but the next morning he drove over to Steve's house, where he'd most likely be staying the rest of break. Upon arrival, he saw that the Christmas tree had yet to be decorated. He also noticed-barely- the small blonde running up to him, about to pounce.

"Mikey!" she shrieked. He snorted and leaned down to hug her. "I made them wait until you were here to decorate the tree." He saw movement out of the corner of his eye and saw Nancy making her way towards them. She smiled at him and nodded.

"I kinda wanted to wait too. It's tradition for the three of us to decorate it together." she told him. He grinned and hugged her too.

"Thanks, Nance, Hols. It really means a lot." he told them, honestly.

They smiled at him, and Nancy pushed him up the stairs and showed him the room he'd be staying in.

"There was a twin sized bed in here that was for guests but we've made this *your* room for you to stay in, until we make the move to Chicago." She explained to him. "So consider this big ass bed one of your Christmas presents that you get to take with you to the house after we sell this place." She winked at him and he rolled his eyes, but thanked her.

"A king sized though? Really?"

"If you haven't noticed, Mike, you're fucking huge and would probably take up three fourth's of a queen when you *starfish* . Poor El wouldn't have any space to sleep." He huffed.

" *I* don't have any space when we sleep in the same bed." He said, sticking his tongue out at her. "The girl is tiny but damn she's strong, even when she's asleep. Nearly pushes me off the bed sometimes."

"So you two have slept together then?" She asked.

"N-no! Not like t-that!" He stuttered, glaring at her. She raised her eyebrows.

"I didn't mean *like that* . What are you? Twelve?" He scowled at her.

"Shut up. But yeah, we've slept- in the same bed- together." He told her.

"When did that happen? You two have only been together for what, two weeks now?" He nodded.

"The first night I was sick. She got off work early and made me take a shower and lay in her bed because my sheets were gross and sweaty." She chuckled.

"Sounds like her. You wanna unpack now or go ahead and decorate the tree?"

"The latter." He said, grinning at her. She rolled her eyes.

"You and your fancy words."

"That's not even fancy, Nance. Compared to other shit I've written." She rolled her eyes and shut the door behind her, following him down the hallway.

"I wouldn't know, considering I've never read anything you've written. And you've let El, apparently!"

"If I ever get anything published- officially- you can read it. How's that sound?" She rolled her eyes *again.*

"Whatever you say, little brother." She said.

"I'm not even little anymore!" He grumbled. "Like I'm a whole foot taller than you now."

"Still younger than me." She retorted.

Mike ran downstairs ahead of her and she rolled her eyes, making her way down.

"Okay, why exactly are we in the kitchen?" She asked, hands on her hips. Mike looked at her and shrugged.

"I don't know."

"I don't know either." Holly said. "I was gonna get something but I don't remember what it was." Mike snorted.

"Me."

"You're tall as shit, Wheeler, come help me get stuff out of the attic." Steve said, motioning for him to follow. Mike made a face.

"What's that gotta do with anything? There are literally stairs going up there." He made a face.

"Just come on." He grumbled walking away. Mike rolled his eyes but followed him. They got a couple boxes of decorations into the living room when Steve said, "So uh, I'm gonna need you to break it to Nance that we have no working Christmas lights." Mike stared at him

for a second.

"The fact that you're afraid of my sister amazes me." He said, finally.

"You don't *even* know, dude."

"Pretty sure I do? I lived in the same house as her for like fourteen years!"

"Okay, yeah, you have a point but you're her brother. I'm her boyfriend- hopefully soon to be fiancée- and she has for *sure* treated us differently." Mike rolled his eyes. *So dramatic.*

"Fine, I'll tell her. Or, I can just grab Hols and take her with me to get some and do some Christmas shopping? That way she won't necessarily know you don't have any." *No like it'd be that big a deal, anyways.*

"Okay, okay, cool. Yeah, do that. We won't have to deal with the wrath of your older sister now." Mike rolled his eyes again and grabbed the last box of ornaments, taking it into the living room.

"Hey Hols, you wanna go to the mall and Wal-mart with me?" He asked, putting it next to the other boxes. She and Nancy both eyed him.

"Why?" Holly asked.

"Why not?" He retorted. "You don't *have* to go. I just figured, you know?" He pouted a little and Nancy rolled her eyes.

"I want to go!" She said defensively. "I just wanted to know why." She mumbled.

"That's for me to know, and you to find out when we get there." He said, grinning at her. He gave her a knowing look, which she didn't get, and said, "Go get ready and we'll go in a few minutes."

9. Chapter Nine

"Why did you all of a sudden want me to come shopping with you?" Holly asked, as she buckled her seat belt.

"Well, the main reason is because I want to spend time with you, you know, one on one?" She nodded. "Plus, I need some help Christmas shopping, and we need to buy some Christmas lights. Steve doesn't have any." Holly snorted.

"Of course he doesn't." She rolled her eyes. "Can I get some earbuds while we're there?"

"Yeah."

"Awesome, I need some." He snorted.

"I honestly need some headphones too, so." He shrugged.

"Why do most guys I know like headphones? They're big and bulky and would ruin my hair." Mike held in a laugh.

"A lot of guys don't care about their hair, Hols. I don't, but everyone knows that."

"I bet you could put your hair in a ponytail now." Mike eyed her.

"Why would I do that?"

"It's better than always wearing it down. It looks hot, Mike." She said, as if it was obvious. "Your hair is really thick and I know you don't wanna cut it, so ponytails are easier. And better." He chuckled.

"Okay, you can experiment with my hair later, alright?" She grinned and nodded.

The two went to Wal-Mart first and got some Christmas lights and earbuds for Holly, headphones for Mike, and then went to the mall.

"I want to buy something special for Nancy and Steve." Holly said.

"You do?" He asked, curious. She nodded.

"You know, for taking care of me?" He nodded. "I want to do something for them."

"Do you have anything in mind?" He asked. She shook her head. "If I tell you a secret, will you promise not to tell *anyone* ? Not even your best friend." She nodded excitedly and he leaned down to whisper in her ear.

"No way!" She shrieked, and then slapped a hand over her mouth. "He's really proposing?" She whispered. He nodded.

"He asked me for permission yesterday."

"He asked you?" She made a face and he rolled his eyes.

"Yeah. Anyways, maybe we could buy and decorate a scrapbook for them? I can ask around for pictures and stuff. I'm sure Jonathan and El have tons of them over the years." Holly gasped a little and nodded.

"Yes! Why are your ideas always so good?" She asked. He shrugged.

"Not *all* of them are." She scoffed.

"I've never heard an idea of yours that wasn't."

"Ice skating last year."

"Point taken."

The two had been in and out of at least eight stores when they're time together went sour- though only for a minute or two. They were leaving Sephora- Holly having dragged him inside so he could buy Nancy a gift- when they walked by Karen and Billy, of all people. Karen stared at them as they walked by, and the two stared back, and Mike shook his head when he faced forward, scoffing and muttering under his breath. Billy hadn't paid them any attention, talking on the phone.

"Whore." Holly muttered.

"Whore." Mike grumbled at the same time, and they looked at each other before laughing. "Do you wanna get a milkshake?"

"In winter?" She asked, lips witching upward. He grinned.

"Duh."

"Of course I do." He nodded and she skipped beside him as they made their way out to his truck, but the fact that his *mother* didn't speak or even smile at neither of them stayed in the back of Mike's mind the whole time.

"Cookout good?" He asked as they drove down the road. She nodded and turned the radio up, dancing in her seat. He smiled and sang along.

"What kind do you want?" He asked as they walked in.

"The Oreo mint thing." She said, "And can I get fries?" She asked. He snorted and nodded.

"Go find us a seat and I'll be right there." She nodded and went over to a booth at the back and sat down. Mike joined her a few minutes later with the shakes in hand, a straw and a spoon. She raised her eyebrows at him when he took the top off of his and started eating it like ice cream, while she used the straw.

"Mike, what are you even doing?" A voice asked. Mike looked up and saw El walking towards him with Joyce on her heels. He grinned and held up a spoon of chocolate milkshake.

"Eating a milkshake." He said matter of factly.

"Why are you *eating* a milkshake?"

"It's hard to *drink* through a straw! It's basically ice cream." He shrugged. El looked back at Joyce who just chuckled and shrugged.

"He's got a point. They make them thick and it's hard to suck through a straw." She said. El raised an eyebrow and poked at Mike's side until he scooted over. Holly did the same for Joyce and smiled at her.

"Are you guys just stalking us or are you here to eat?" Mike asked, putting a spoonful in his mouth.

"I ordered while El was in the bathroom." Joyce said.

"You guys have been here that long?" Holly asked. They nodded.

"I didn't notice either of you."

"You're oblivious to everything, Mike." El said, grinning at him. He pouted. "What? You said that when we first met over text messages."

"Oh, true." He snorted. He held the spoon up to her. "Want some?" She nodded and he fed it to her. She made an impressed face.

"Pretty good. Don't know why they call it a milkshake when it's literally soft ice cream."

"My point exactly!"

Mike and Holly stayed at cookout with El and Joyce until they finished their meals and went their separate ways- Mike and El sharing a kiss that Holly mocked gagging at. On the way back to Steve's house, neither mentioned their mother, or really even thought about her.

When they got back, the two managed to sneak past Nancy and Steve up the stairs and put all the gifts in Mike's room, and then joined the two downstairs.

"Why'd it take you guys so long to buy lights?" Nancy asked, eyebrows raised. Mike looked like a deer caught in headlights and looked at Steve, who shrugged.

"What can I say? She has great hearing." Mike rolled his eyes.

"We bought a bunch of gifts and got milkshakes. El and Joyce came in and we sat with them until they were done."

"Uh huh, is my present in there by any chance?" She asked, wiggling her eyebrows.

"Could be." He grinned cheekily, and then held up a bag. "We didn't know if you wanted colored or white lights so we got both."

"I told him you'd want colored like usual but he didn't believe me." Holly stated.

"Well, Hols, he was kind of right. I wanna try out the white lights this year." Holly pouted. "Hey, we'll still be able to use them. Steve found a small tree in the corner of the attic and we're gonna put it in your room."

"Really?" She asked. Nancy nodded, smiling. Holly always wanted her own mini Christmas tree in her room, and this was the first time she'd ever get it. She squealed quietly and hugged the two.

"How much were the lights?" Steve asked Mike, reaching into his pocket for his wallet.

"Don't worry about it." Mike waved him off.

"I am gonna worry about it. I want to pay you back."

"I've got plenty, man, I'm not taking your money." Mike shook his head.

"You should know by now that he isn't, babe." Nancy told Steve, who huffed. Mike stuck his tongue out at him but said,

"Now, don't we have two Christmas trees to decorate?"

The Par-tayy

(7:23 PM) Eleven- I've been meaning to do this forever

(Eleven changed Magic Mike to Noodle)

(7:24) Dusty- well that came out of no where

(7:24) Eleven- not really lmao

(7:25) Eleven- Mike just randomly sent me a picture of 2 noodles and said 'me' with no context

(7:25) Zoomer- did he send you a pic of his dick or something?

(7:26) Willy Will- ...

(7:27) Zoomer- oh shit you said TWO noodles my bad

(7:28) Noodle- yo what the fuck

(7:28) Noodle- El when i said me that was the context

(7:28) Noodle- cus you know i'm a noddle?

(7:29) Eleven- Noddle

(Eleven changed Noodle to Noddle)

(7:30) Noddle- omfg

(7:31) Stalker- max why did you think he was talking about his dick??

(7:32) Zoomer- cus i read it wrong and you know some guys refer to their dicks as noddles

(7:32) Zoomer- or call someone elses a noodle as an insult which doesn't make sense but idfk

(7:33) Noddle- why is my girlfriend betraying me? The world may never know

(7:35) Eleven- I'm not betraying you I'm just stating facts

(7:35) Noddle- why you stating facts everyone already knew?

(7:36) Eleven- shut

(7:36) Eleven- it's a free country i can do what i WANT

Thursday, December 14, 2017

"Mike! You have a visitor!" Nancy called. Mike groaned and got off his bed, trudging downstairs. He heard the familiar voice of his girlfriend and his mood brightened instantly. He grinned as he

rounded the corner. She looked behind her and saw him and broke out into a grin too, rushing over to him and wrapping her arms around his middle.

"You'd think they hadn't seen each other in months." Steve said, rolling his eyes.

"It's been four days." El mumbled into Mike's chest. "I'm used to seeing him everyday. It's weird."

"Yeah, what she said." Mike said, nuzzling into her hair.

"Jesus Christ." Steve shook his head. "Disgustingly cute."

"Dustin said the same thing last time we were together." El said, looking back at them.

"Why haven't you seen each other in four days anyways?" Nancy asked.

"Mom and dad are determined to spend every minute with all of us." El explained. "Dad kept complaining that he never sees me anymore, even when I'm home, but you know how dramatic he is." Mike snorted. "Can I stay the night?" She asked shyly, looking up at Mike and then at Nancy, who chuckled.

"As long as you two keep it quiet, I don't care. You're welcome here anytime, El."

"Nancy!" Mike hissed. "Shut up." He grumbled. El patted his back, grinning at him.

"We'll keep quiet." El told her, and released Mike, grabbing his hand and pulling him up the stairs as he sputtered and Nancy laughed her ass off.

"You look like a sun burnt grease trap!" El laughed when she noticed how red his cheeks were. He pouted and went into his room, falling face first onto the bed. El giggled and shut the door, plopping on the bed next to him, gasping. "Oh wow! This is comfy!" She bounced a little and he snorted, lifting his head up to look at her.

"Nancy said it was one of my Christmas presents, apparently." He shrugged. "They're gonna bring it to us when they move to Chicago." She smiled, biting her lip. "What?"

"You said us... I don't know, that just makes me happy." He grinned.

"Of course, it's *us* now, not just me." He tilted his head to the side a little.

God, he is SO cute.

She got on her side and pecked him on the lips. She pulled away but he moved with her, pressing their lips together again. He lifted himself up with his arms and moved so he was hovering over her, without breaking the kiss. She opened her mouth slightly and ran her tongue across his bottom lip, and he opened his, granting her access. One hand tangled in his hair and the other began roaming across his side and back, wrapping one leg around his thigh.

They eventually broke apart for air, but not for long, as El managed to flip them over, shocking not only Mike, but herself, and straddled his waist. She leaned down, attaching her lips to his collar bone and sucking gently, electing a small gasp from him. She smirked, and continued.

Before anything else that *could* have started happening, happened, there was a knock on the door. El jumped to the complete other side of the bed, nearly falling off the bed. Mike started laughing and sat up, adjusting his shirt and shaking his head, before standing up and opening the door.

"Can I borrow your charger?" Holly asked.

"Uh, yeah," he grabbed it off the dresser and handed it to her.

"Thank you!" She sang as she walked off down the hall. Mike shut the door again and leaned against it, looking at El who was trying to fix her hair. She looked up at Mike and noticed him watching her, and snorted.

"She's literally the only one who knows what knocking means." He plopped back down on the bed.

"At least we know *one* person who does." She said, scooting over to him. "At my house, they'd just walk in the room whether the door was open or not. And same with the rest of our friends." She rolled her eyes fondly. He chuckled.

"You wanna go to the mall with me tomorrow?" He asked.

"Yeah, I was actually going anyways, gotta get Will his present. He's been up my ass all week and I haven't had a chance to." He laughed.

"Same but with Holly. I love it though." She smiled at him. "Wanna watch Netflix?" He asked. She raised an eyebrow at him.

"And chill or...?" He turned red and she started laughing.

Sunday, December 17, 2017

A few days later Mike and El had everyone's gifts bought and wrapped, including those for each other. Mike decided to finally give in to what the rest of his friends wanted and wrote them each a little note, exactly the same, in five Christmas cards (El was included and she didn't know it) to give to them on Christmas Eve during their party at Steve's house.

Nancy decided it was time to bring out the photo albums, and El had the best time looking at Mike's baby pictures. Apparently, Nancy had been collecting and hoarding some of the more recent (embarrassing) ones- videos included, which he put on the TV with a giggle- and Nancy snagged plenty of pictures of all of them, and they each had a baby book, which El enjoyed flipping through, seeing a tiny, curly haired Mike grinning at the camera, which soon started turning into glares as he got older.

"I see your booty Mike!" El laughed, pointing at a picture of Mike in the bathtub when he was a couple years old. He turned red and grumbled under his breath and she laughed.

"Mike, oh my God." She said, covering her mouth. He raised an eyebrow, a smile forming on his face.

"What?"

"I'm sitting in front of you in this picture." She said, pointing at it. He looked over her shoulder to see their class sitting in the bleachers senior year, and Mike and the rest of the Party were sitting behind her and Will. El was smiling brightly, while Mike looked like he was in pain. "Why do you look like you're in pain?" She asked. He snorted.

"Because Max smacked me til I smiled. And she hits hard."

Sunday, December 24, 2017

Mike didn't wake up until one o'clock in the afternoon, when there was a loud banging on the door. He groaned, looking at his phone and noticing the time.

"How the fuck..." he muttered. The banging started again. "What?" he yelled.

"You need to get your lazy ass up, Wheeler!" Steve yelled. "We've gotta go to Wal-Mart and buy decorations for the party because *someone* forgot too."

“Shut up, Steve.” Mike groaned.

"Well if you're gonna be a snotty little ass you don't have to go!” Steve huffed, smacking the door again.

“Give me ten minutes, jackass.” Mike heard him laugh as he walked away and rolled his eyes. He changed into actual clothes, brushed his teeth, and he and Steve left after saying their goodbyes to the girls.

"So, Wheeler, do you happen to know what Nancy's favorite song is?"

"Witch Doctor." He muttered absentmindedly.

"What?" Steve asked, eyes wide.

"Oh, what?" Mike asked.

" *Witch Doctor* is Nancy's favorite song?" Mike froze for a second and laughed.

"No, sorry." He shook his head at himself. "That used to be a song we would sing together when we were little. Don't ask why. Um... If I'm being completely honest, it's probably Can You Feel the Love Tonight." He said, shrugging. "Or Tiny Dancer."

"Hmm, the first one is by Elton John, right?"

"They both are, idiot." Mike rolled his eyes.

"It's not my fault you're majoring in music and know fuck all about everything." Steve grumbled. Mike shrugged. "You think you and your lil friends could sing that tonight?"

"Why?"

"Why do you think?" Steve glanced at him, giving him a look, before turning back to the road.

"I don't know."

"I'm proposing to her, idiot."

"Oh! I thought you were doing that *tomorrow* ?"

"I was, but I decided to do it tonight. She may have mentioned that she'd love to be proposed to in front of friends and family when we watched a Christmas movie the other night."

"Seems more like she hinted it to me." Mike replied.

"Maybe, maybe not. I don't think she'll be expecting it though. But could you ask?"

"I guess." Mike took his phone out and texted the group chat.

(1:46 PM) Noddle- hey are you guys up to singing tonight

(1:48) Zoomer- what for? idrc i'm down either way jc

(1:49) Dusty- hell yeah boii

(1:49) Noddle- Steve wants us to sing a elton john song

(1:50) Willy Will- Elton John is the shit I'm up for it

(1:51) Eleven- I'm not agreeing to anything yet but whyy

(1:52) Noddle- idek Steve just asked me to ask you guys

(1:58) Eleven- I agree to nothing.

(2:00) Willy Will- wait el, has Mike ever heard you sing?

(2:03) Eleven- hahahaha

(2:03) Eleven- no...

(2:04) Willy Will- JANE ELEANOR HOPPER.

(2:04) Stalker- oh shit the full name.

Two hours later, the two were back at the house with the majority of the decorations put up, when Dustin and Lucas walked in through the door with a decent sized box. Mike eyed them as they went into the living room without a word to anyone. Nancy looked at him and made a what the fuck gesture. He shrugged and turned to go join them, but nearly ran into the short brunette, who gave him a bright smile upon seeing him.

"Hey Mike!" El said happily, wrapping her arms around his neck to hug him. He chuckled and hugged her back.

"Someone's excited, huh?"

"I love Christmas." She said cheekily. "And I may have had half a bottle of wine with Max, who went to the bathroom." He chuckled, shaking his head at her.

"You're adorable." He said.

"No, you are." She booped his nose. "Are you okay?" She asked, staring at him. It felt like she was staring into his soul, almost.

"Yeah, I'm fine, why?"

"You don't seem like yourself." He smiled a little.

"I'm fine, I promise." *Don't lie to her.*

"You're one hundred percent sure?" She asked.

"One hundred percent sure." He smiled at her and kissed her cheek. *Liar.*

"Okay, well, I'm gonna go put all my shit in your room so that I can get ready later, then I'm gonna help them set up the karaoke machine." She practically skipped away from him after picking up her bags.

"Wait, the *what* ?"

"So, what's up?" Steve asked, looking at Mike as he handed him the joint. Mike made a face as he hit it.

"The sky." He replied. Steve rolled his eyes and took the joint back from him.

"I'm serious, here, Wheeler. Something's up with you."

"Why do you think that?" Mike asked, confused.

"You haven't been yourself since yesterday, you've been spacing out a lot. " He replied simply. Mike raised an eyebrow. "I may be an idiot but I pay attention, Mike. I've known you since you were twelve, practically a baby." Mike frowned a little at that.

“I’m alright, just… it’s Christmas Eve. I’m usually at my parents house around this time, either having fun with my mom and Holly, or hearing mom and dad go at it from the basement. I can’t help but miss it.” Steve nodded in understanding.

“You miss your mom.” he said. Mike sighed and nodded.

“I really do. And I really don’t fucking want to. I can’t help it.”

“I get it, man. It’s your *mom* . I miss mine all the time.”

“At least yours will tell you Happy Thanksgiving or Merry

Christmas.”

“I wouldn’t go that far.”

“Well, she acknowledges you.”

“It’s her loss, man. Fuck her.”

“Still sucks.” he muttered.

“I know.”

"Dude, your weed game sucks."

"Fuck off, Wheeler. I don't do that loud shit, who knows what you'd be doing if you smoked that. You'd probably jump in the pool even though it's like twenty degrees." Mike snorted.

"That got deep."

"What I just said or stuff before?"

"Before." Another few minutes go buy. "Steve?"

"Hm?"

"I'm hungry." The munchies finally kicked in.

With a laugh, Steve stood and helped Mike up, and they walked into the house.

"Goddammit, Steve, stop getting my brother high every time he's home for break." Nancy said, huffing. She kissed the two on the cheek before walking out the door. Mike blinked.

"What the fuck." He whispered.

"You're high?" El asked, eyebrows raised as she looked at him.

"Um..." He looked at Steve, who shrugged, and then his friends, who gave him similar looks. "A little bit."

"May I ask why?"

"Um...Something, uh, happened yesterday while you guys were gone?" He offered. She sighed.

"I asked him to smoke with me, it wasn't much, Ella Bella, so it's not a big deal." She pursed her lips.

"I'd rather you be high on weed than crack. It better not be a regular thing, Michael." She gave him a pointed look. His hand froze mid air after stuffing a cookie in his mouth.

"S'not." He said, “I shwear." She snorted. Steve backed away slowly as El offered Mike a bite of her sandwich, which he took gladly.

"What happened that's bad enough for him to agree to smoke with you?" Max asked, following him.

"Stuff." Steve replied, taking Dustin's bowl of popcorn.

"What kind of stuff?"

"He'll tell you when he's not as high." Steve replied. "Now if you need me, I'm gonna go eat the rest of this popcorn and take a nap until everyone gets here. Tell Mike the song is Can You Feel the Love Tonight." Without another word, he strutted up the stairs.

"Why does Steve think he's a model?" Max asked, coming into the kitchen, where Mike and El were sitting side by side at the island.

"Because he is, duh." Mike said as if it was obvious. He shoved a mouthful of chips in his mouth. "Have you seen his hair?" El snorted.

"Don't talk with your mouthful." She scolded.

"Sorry." She looked at him and he giggled.

"You're gonna get fat eating the whole bag of chips, Mike." Max said, leaning on the other side of the island.

"Your mom." Was his reply. Max cackled.

"You're not wrong."

The boys managed to set up the karaoke machine easily, and once that was done, Pearl and Charlie Sinclair, Claudia, Hopper, Joyce, Jonathan and Nancy had arrived with food and presents.

"Nope, get out of the kitchen!" Joyce scolded, waving a rag at them. "We're eating in a few minutes, hold your horses."

"Holy- Mike is about to *die.* " Dustin said, in awe. Mike turned to look at him.

"Why am I about to-" Mike's eyes widened at the sight before him. "Whoa." His jaw literally dropped.

Max and El walked down the stairs, arm in arm, acting like they were about to go to prom. At least, that's what it looked like to everyone else. They both had their hair and makeup done- which was rare for Max. Max was wearing a dark green, long sleeved, tight fitting romper. With *heels.*

El on the other hand, also wore heels, but she had on a red dress where the straps fell slightly down her shoulders. It was knee length, not as tight fitting as Max's romper, but pretty close.

Lucas looked much like Mike, eyes wide, jaw dropped.

"You'll catch flies, Wheeler." Hopper commented, nudging him. "You too, Sinclair."

"Uh..." Lucas said, and Mike made a noise that no one had ever heard before as he shut his mouth. He glanced around, just noticing that the other women were dressed up as well.

"Why-Why are y'all dressed up?" He squeaked. El giggled.

"Well, I figured that since we had a tradition with mom and dad-" Nancy made a face at the mention of the two, "that we could start our own and dress up and celebrate Christmas together."

"Oh." He nodded. He looked at El again, who was smiling shyly at him. Max walked over to Lucas and smacked him gently on the cheek with a laugh, pecking him on the lips.

"You look awesome." He managed to tell her. Mike walked over to El as everyone started talking again, and without a word, took her hand and pulled her into the kitchen.

"Mike-" He interrupted her with a passionate kiss, her words falling on deaf ears as she melted into it with a happy sigh. Pulling away, he said,

"You look gorgeous." She smiled up at him. His eyes widened a little. "Not that you aren't always gorgeous but extra gorgeous." She full on laughed at that, putting her head on his chest as she laughed. He chuckled with her. She calmed down, looking back up at him, letting her hands move across his shoulders and down his arms as she pushed him away a little, giving him a good look.

"I love you in sweaters." She said, giving him a grin. "You're so freaking cute."

"Stop!" He whined. She giggled.

"I'll do what I *want* ." She replied, raising an eyebrow.

"Oh really now?"

"Mhm..." She went to kiss him again but was interrupted.

"So, can someone tell me why Max is wearing heels?" Mike asked, sitting between El and Holly on the couch after dinner. Max rolled her eyes. "Because she didn't even wear heels to prom so... I'm confused."

"Well," El took a sip of her drink, "I forget how the conversation came up, but she and Dustin were talking about heels, and Dustin didn't believe she could walk in them so they made a bet. Dustin owes her fifteen bucks." Mike looked at Dustin for a few seconds before shaking his head.

"Okay..." He eyed Max, who had a weird look on her face- grinning but eyebrows furrowed. "I didn't even know you *owned* heels."

"They're El's." She responded quickly. He snorted.

"You're feet are bigger than El's, Max." Dustin cackled at that. "I would know considering you two love to put your feet in my face." He gave them both a pointed look and El laughed.

"I just have them." She said, finally. "I don't think you'd want to know the reason, Wheeler." His eyes widened when she glanced at Lucas. He choked on his spit.

"Well then." He said, standing up. "I'm gonna go, you know, try to forget the information given to me."

"You do that." She said, cheeks turning red. El busted out laughing as Mike nearly ran up the stairs to his room.

Whatever she was insinuating is gross. Gives me a great excuse to go smoke, though.

Mike put on his shoes and grabbed a coat, taking the pack out of his bedside table. No one was paying him any attention so he sneaked out the back door and sat in one of the chairs on the porch. He smoked maybe half of it before he heard the door open and a soft voice ask,

"Are you okay?" He turned his head and gave El a small smile and nodded.

"Yeah, I'm alright." She walked over to him and stood beside him, one of his other coats on.

"Are you still... thinking about stuff?" He turned away from her and blew some smoke out of his mouth, putting the cigarette out on the concrete. He turned back to her.

"Kind of. It's not as bad as it was yesterday afternoon and today." He told her honestly. "It's just always in the back of my mind, and after she came over yesterday it's just messed me up. I was itching to get a cigarette halfway through dinner, honestly." She chuckled.

"Can I sit?" She asked.

"Of course- Oh!" He snorted as she plopped herself in his lap, wrapping her arms around his neck and curling up like a child. He

wrapped his arms around her to keep her steady.

"I'm sorry about everything that's happened." She told him quietly. "I wish I could make it all better for you, but I don't know what to do. What can I do, Mike?" His breath caught in his throat.

"Just... Just keep being yourself around me. Don't pity me like everyone else has." He told her. "You alone have made me feel better. I know you love me, and I love you. That's all I can ask of you." She smiled slightly, and nodded.

"I do love you." She whispered, kissing his cheek. She rested her head on his shoulder, and he leaned against her head. They sat like that for a while, until you could no longer see the stars thanks to the clouds rolling in.

"Hey lovebirds, we're opening presents here!" Will called.

"Fuck off!" Mike called back and Will laughed. El started to get up but Mike stopped her, standing up easily and carrying her bridal style.

"Oh, I like this." She giggled. Will rolled his eyes at the two but held the door open for them.

"Damn, Mike, have you been working out?" Lucas asked, grinning.

"Are you calling me fat?" El asked, crossing her arms. Mike raised an eyebrow at him.

"Uh, no... It's just, you know... Mike is a noodle?" He offered. Mike rolled his eyes and put El down, pecking her on the cheek.

"Wanna go?" Mike joked, standing in front of Lucas. Lucas snickered.

"Maybe later." He replied.

"I'm holding you to that, Sinclair." Mike winked at him and Lucas cackled.

"Let's open presents! Let's open presents!" Dustin chanted.

"Jesus." Hopper grumbled. "Give me some of your energy."

"Lemme go grab something." Mike said as El handed her his coat with a smirk. He went back upstairs and kicked off his shoes and took off his own coat, before grabbing his guitar and joined everyone back in the living room. He sat on the floor by El's legs and grinned up at her.

"Who's first?" Dustin asked, bouncing in his seat, making his mom smack his knee to make him stop. Steve- being closest to the tree- reached under and pulled out a small rectangle.

"Mike!" He said, grinning at Dustin- who pouted- as he handed Mike the present.

"Who's it from?" El asked, leaning on her knees and looking over his shoulder.

"Holly." He replied. He looked up to see his little sister looking at him nervously, waiting for him to open it as Steve passed around gifts. He tore into the paper, and picked at the tape on the box. "Jeez, Hols, am I not supposed to get into it?" He joked. She snorted and shrugged. Finally, he got it and opened, revealing a guitar strap with a galaxy design on it. His eyes widened slightly.

"How'd you know?" He asked, surprised. He'd seen it when they were at the mall but decided not to get it- the reason unknown even to him.

"I saw you looking at it when we went to the mall." She said, shrugging.

"I love it." He smiled at her and she grinned. As everyone was handed their presents and opened them, he changed guitar straps, and finally opened his stuff.

"I have an actual present for you tomorrow." Mike told El as he gave everyone their cards. She laughed and nodded.

"Jesus, Mike, you didn't even try to get us gifts this year?" Max said with a raised brow.

"Just open the thing, fucker." He replied with a snort. They opened

them at the same time and Dustin *screamed* .

"Mike! No way!"

"I'm really going to regret this, but yeah." He nodded.

"What is it?" Joyce asked, confused. El grinned as the rest of the party yelled at Mike excitedly.

"They've been wanting to get a pet for the house since we started college." She explained. "And since Mike's grandparents own the house and Mike practically does, he had the say so- which they all agreed on, but he's finally letting them get a pet."

"And please, *no* cats." Mike begged. Dustin pouted. "I don't trust you guys enough, so El is in charge. You guys get to pick it together but no cats." He looked at El, a pleading look in his eyes. "Please no cats." He whispered. She chuckled and leaned down to kiss his head.

"No cats."

After presents had been opened and people- aka Dustin- declared their love for their presents, wrapping paper was cleaned up and boxed squished for the fire later, and Claudia and Lucas' parents left, it was time for the proposal.

"I see Michael has his guitar out." Steve said, looking at him with an eyebrow raised.

"That I do, Steven."

"Not my name, ass."

"Michael might be my name but I hate it so, Steven it is, *ass* ." Mike retorted.

"Touché."

"Why don't you play us something?" Joyce asked. "We haven't heard you in a while."

"Oh jeez." Mike chuckled. "Okay." He grabbed his guitar, grinning at

Holly as he put the strap over his head. He messed around with the strings for a couple seconds, before beginning. " *There's a calm surrender to the rush of day,* " He sang softly, " *when the heat of the rolling world can be turned away, an enchanted moment and it sees me through, it's enough for this restless warrior just to be with you...* " Nancy raised an eyebrow at Mike as he, Max, Lucas, Will and Dustin started singing.

" *And can you feel the love tonight?* "

"So uh, I didn't prepare a speech or anything," Steve started, and she turned to him, curious, "I just want to say that I love you more than anything in the world. Nancy Wheeler," He got down on one knee and literally *everyone* gasped, but Mike kept singing,

" *And can you feel the love tonight?* "

"Will you do me the honor and become my wife?" He held the box up to her and opened it, gulping visibly.

"I knew you were acting weird!" She exclaimed, jumping off the couch and onto him. "Yes!" She squealed, kissing him and hugging him tightly. Everyone cheered and congratulated them as Steve finally put the ring on her finger. Mike had stopped singing, but he was still playing the guitar and smiling at them.

"Told you she'd say yes." He told him.

"You were in on it?" Nancy asked, looking at him.

"Mhm... He asked for permission last month." Steve grinned cheekily and nodded.

"You know, at the time he was kind of, like, the only important guy in the family, so I felt it was only right to ask him."

"You shit." Nancy laughed, hugging him again. "Mike, stop playing that damn guitar so I can hug you too."

"I will continue playing until you apologize for calling it a damn guitar."

"You just called it an it." Hopper said, raising an eyebrow.

"My guitar, man, shhh." Mike shushed him.

"Jesus Christ." Nancy shook her head. Mike snorted and stopped playing, setting it to the side and standing, pulling her into a big hug.

"So you've known this whole time?" Dustin asked Mike, who nodded.

"That's the only reason you asked us to sing with you?" Max asked.

"Pretty much, yeah."

"Wow, rude." Lucas pouted. "We never sing together anymore."

"We're busy, man." Mike waved him off.

"Busy my ass, all you do is write songs and make out with El." Hopper grunted at that comment. "Like all we ever hear is you two giggling and shit."

"We might make out a lot but dammit, Lucas, we're watching vines compilations on my computer." El retorted, standing up and wrapping her arms around Mike's waist. He grinned and stuck his tongue out at Lucas. "And may I remind you, our rooms are right next to each other. We've heard some shit that you two wouldn't want to get out." Max cackled and Lucas' eyes widened.

"Stop teaching your girlfriend to blackmail us, Wheeler."